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LAIR • RIDGE RACER 7 • VIRTUA TENNIS 3
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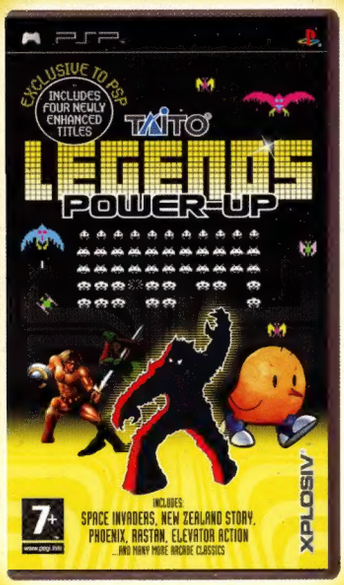

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We are next3

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Editor's Letter

So you may have noticed: we finally got a Playstation 3 in the office and a fistful of Blu-ray beta discs too, containing a selection of games. Some of it has been impressive, some of it not. Some has exceeded expectations, again, some not.

In the particularly good column stands *Resistance* (next-gen glass and all), a game that improves level-by-level to be the best FPS to ever appear on a PlayStation-branded console, Sony's own *Formula One* game that just about looks like the real (televisual) thing if you squint at the screen just right and *Lair* for its innovative, and surprisingly well-implemented use of the Sixaxis' tilt function. Oh, and *MotorStorm* and the two *Virtua* games (*Tennis* and *Fighter*) for their use of next-gen hardware to update old-style games. In the bad column resides *Genji* with its oh-so-last-gen hack-'n'-slash gameplay and *Ridge Racer 7* with its, well, oh-so-last-gen slide-'n'-race gameplay.

So, on the whole, a pretty good start for Playstation 3 – its launch line-up of games will certainly eclipse those that marked Xbox 360's debut. But I suppose what's the most impressive thing is the console itself. It feels and looks the business – it's heavy and shiny and is real object of desire. It helps that the games are great and also the functionality of the thing is pretty spectacular – you could simply spend hours playing around with it *without* even putting a game in its chrome-coated disc drive – and you can find out all about it in our massive 39-page feature.

Go ahead and read it, it's time to get excited about March.

Your team on next3

Bringing you the best advice from the experts

Keith Hennessey

"Bash it!" Keith was heard to cry as he played through dragons-without-the-dungeons game *Lair*. That was his answer to everything this month: bash dragons, bash doors, bash the bloody controller on the floor when the dragons bashed him back. Unfortunately those Sixaxis controllers cost £100 to replace. Or at least that's what Jones told him. Bash away, Keith, bash away.

Thomas Leclerc

Tom was dedicated *Formula One* game this ish. Boasting that he was an expert at all things motor sport, Tom proceed to turn off all steering and braking assistance, switch damage to max and toggled the weather to rainy. Needless to say, he didn't even make it half way down the starting straight at Monza. Go, go, go, Leclerc!

Craig Gilmore

Mud and guts – the two things that impress 'Mister' Gilmore the most. That's why he was thrilled to get to play *MotorStorm* and *Resistance* this issue, the two PS3 games that can boast both these things. This also neatly answers the eternal quesiton: who ate all the mud pies? It was Craig, of course. He's on a special low-carb, high-fibre diet. Gutted, or what?

next3

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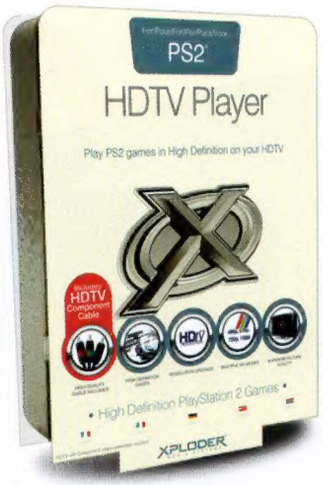

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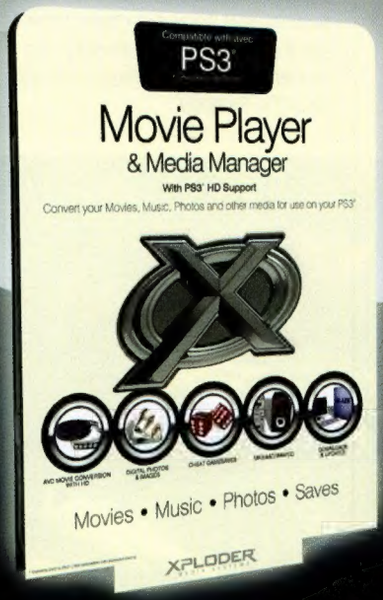
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IF YOU WANT TO HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT ANYTHING PS3 RELATED, ANYTHING NEXT3 RELATED, ANYTHING GAMING RELATED THEN WE NEED YOU TO GET WRITING...

STAR LETTER

PS3 for Xmas 2007?

I'm writing because I have a very large concern: PS3! Okay, it's been delayed until March and this is now old news. What worries me is that I recently started working in my local Gamestation, and they all seem pretty sure that even March is a rather optimistic claim from Sony for a release date. The reason for this, and I can see their point, is that Sony has never released a console so early in the year. This is because there is no money so close after Xmas. I'm worried that while the rest of the world are enjoying PS3 for the next 12 months, we Europeans might be waiting as long as this time next year, for the 2007 Xmas rush! Please, say it ain't so! Cheers,

Scott Sigley, Newcastle-under-Lyme

■ **We're confident that the PS3 will launch in March. Supply problems appear to have been overcome as the Japanese gaming public are now getting 100,000 PS3s per week. Sony chose Easter for its launch as it's the second most-important date in the gaming calendar. So we're still betting on it being in March.**

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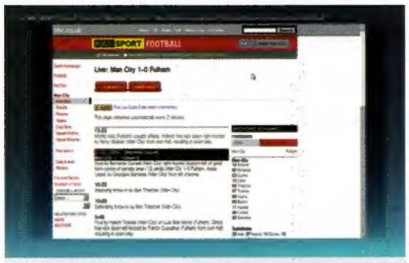

You watt?

I am thinking of getting a Playstation 3 from America, to save the four months wait and I am wondering if it will work okay on the British voltage system, as I know we are different from the Americans and might there be any more problems I have not thought about? Thanks,

Barry, email

■ The US PlayStation works off 110V mains, while the UK voltage is 220V. Simply put, if you plug a US PS3 directly into the UK mains, it'll blow up. You'll need to get yourself a step-down converter to prevent this happening, one that converts 220V to 110V. Your only other concern is that the converter can handle the PS3's power consumption, which around 380 watts. We'd advise playing it safe and getting a converter that can handle up to 500 watts. These retail for about £50. Maplins or another electrical store should be able to help you out.

No wires

I read in your guide that the 60 GB PS3 will have Wi-Fi. I have wireless broadband at home. Does that mean that I can switch it on and go on the internet without using any cables? It works with my PSP so will it work with my new soon to be PS3? Thanks,

Twoface, email

■ In a word, yes. You'll also be able to control your PS3 remotely with your PSP. Clever, eh?

Gay pride

When do you think we could expect an uber-macho hero who is gay? *Metal Gear Solid 2* was promising, though me, and millions like me, crave a hero who appreciates the male aesthetic and doesn't turn into a total wanker at the first sign of tits!

David, email

■ Yeah, Raiden was a pretty good one – have you seen the lipstick he wears in *Metal Gear Solid 4*? But how do you know we haven't already got a gay game hero already? It's so hard to tell these days. Just ask Next3's Tompey.

Raiden shows us his 'Blue Steel' pose. Doesn't his lippy look great?

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PLAYSTATION next3 Headline News

JAPANESE LAUNCH GAME ROUND-UP

Enterbrain the publisher of Japan's Famitsu Magazine has reported a software attach rate of only 0.98 that means that less than one game was purchased for every PS3 sold. These figures mirror the poor sales of Xbox 360 games last year, but is it more a reflection of the limited launch line-up, the shortage of units or consumers just snapping up the standalone consoles in the hope of reselling them at a profit? Whatever it is, we're certain the figures will improve dramatically when fresh PS3 shipments arrive.

Ridge Racer 7
Everything you'd expect from a *Ridge Racer* game, but should we be expecting more?

Resistance: Fall Of Man
The pick of the bunch and the only game that comes close to doing the PS3 justice, but will it shift systems?

Mobile Suit Gundam: Target in Sight
More mechanised violence with a hearty helping of arcade action but unfortunately it's hard to get too excited about a mech game.

Genji: Days Of The Blade
A gorgeous game hindered by tired gameplay.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

A low-key launch for PS3 in Japan

THE launch of the PS3 is perhaps one of the most crucial product launches in Sony's illustrious history. But handicapped by hardware shortages, marred by the 'cash for queues' issue and lacking the highly polished bells and ear piecing whistles normally associated with such a high-profile event, the PS3's retail debut was a strangely subdued affair. With Sony's marketing machine barely making it out of first gear and uncertainty about allocation numbers, most Japanese stores and websites refused to run (or quickly closed) any sort of PS3 pre-order schemes, even Sony's official website refused to offer hardware pre-orders. The announced 100,000 launch-day units dwindled to just over 88,000 (that's half the number of PSPs available for its launch two years ago) so for the unfortunate PlayStation faithful, overnight queue camping became their only real chance of securing a system.

Japanese gamers had their odds shortened even further by having to join linkfull of Europeans keen to get a console in November (as promised), unscrupulous eBay coyotes looking to make a quick buck and, of course, the aforementioned problem of 'cash for queues'. For those unfamiliar with this practice it's a problem that has faced console launches in Japan for years now and involves wealthy Japanese 'businessmen' paying networks of (mainly Chinese) students, pensioners and even homeless to stand in line and wait for a console. When they've purchased the machine the heavy-footed queuer then delivers it directly to their financier. The businessmen will then sell the units for healthy profits in the city and the staffer gets a hot meal – everyone's a winner. Except the honest gamer, of course. It was a problem when both the PSP and DS Lite launched and proved an even bigger issue this time round, so much so that when the first few PS3 purchasers were interviewed (by Ken Kutaragi, no less) none had bought games and few could even understand the questions posed. When one young man agreed to answer some questions about why he wanted a PS3, he replied because 'it's interesting' and when asked about what games he would be

BLACK BOX ON THE GREY MARKET

Supply shortage equals big money

At the time of going to press the going rate for a 60Gb PS3 on eBay was approximately £1000 – that's over twice the retail price. While at first this might seem scandalously expensive, considering the shortage in Japan (which will no doubt be mirrored here) price tags like these are only to be expected. The extra sterling accounts for someone queuing (Chinese or otherwise), the PS3 being secured and the whole thing being shipped direct to your door. But if you currently reside in Japan and can't wait for the posty you could always pump for one of the 'used' systems appearing in stores around Tokyo and Osaka. Funnily enough these 'used' PS3s ('used' meaning never opened) are retailing for double the price of a 'new' one.

EVERY LITTLE HELPS

If you have sufficient money, patience and luck it really does pay off to get your system direct from the retailer. If you braved the elements in Tokyo here's an example of what you could get for your Yen:

60Gb Playstation 3
Resistance: Fall Of Man
Ridge Racer 7
Genji: Days Of The Blade
Sony HDMI Cable
= £375

playing on his shiny new machine, he simply replied 'the tennis game'. Call us cynical but we're not sure that PS3 was for him.

According to reports, Chinese was the most common language spoken in line, but was diluted by a large European contingent, many of who confessed they were only there to pick one up to sell online. It was perhaps this strange mix of nationalities twinned with such a strong desire to secure a unit that led to a handful of skirmishes at electronics retailer Bic Camera in Ikebukuro, where Tokyo police were called in to keep the peace. There were also reports of delivery trucks being hijacked in Akihabara, but this was far from representative of the well-mannered scenes in other parts of Japan's capital city. Stores that were only allocated 100-150 units used different sales methods to keep crowds placated. Some issued tickets to those at the front of the queue that guaranteed them a PS3 while other retailers tried to combat any underhanded buying by selling most of its units via lottery. People in line were handed numbered coupons and if their number was read out they could go to the register and buy their PS3.

Sensibly choosing one of the more unit-heavy stores to kick off the official countdown event, Ken Kutaragi appeared on stage in Yurakucho. The professed father of PlayStation addressed the crowd by simply saying, "Thank you for waiting from late last night. Please enjoy next-generation entertainment." Thanks Ken, very inspirational. But just what was waiting in the next-generation for the lucky few who picked up a PS3? Not very much unfortunately – because of last minute delays to launch games such as *Oblivion* and *Sonic* (read more on page 27), there were only five games in the launch line-up including *Ridge Racer 7* and *Sega Golf Club*. Good games we're sure, but the only real title that comes close to showing off what the PS3 can do is Insomniac's *Resistance: Fall Of Man*, but as is well-documented, Japanese gamers aren't fond of FPSs. With many more games set to arrive within the coming weeks we're certain the situation will soon be rectified.

With Sony looking to re-establish itself as not only the leading brand when it comes to videogames but also the electronics market as a whole, many might be wondering why the PS3 had such a muted launch. Well, with such a shortage of units Sony would be foolish to try and garner even more interest for a machine it can't supply and, at the risk of sounding pompous; people know what to expect from the PS3 and so perhaps don't have to try as hard to promote just what its product is all about. Reuters has reported that 88,400 PS3s were sold during the Japanese launch weekend (33,800 20GB and 54, 600 60GB) so slowly but surely Sony is getting consoles into Japanese homes and ultimately, isn't that what counts?

"Overnight queue camping became their only real chance of securing a system"

NOW WE KNOW

What the retail machine has taught us

PS3 WON'T UPSCALE PSONE OR PS2 GAMES

When you pop a PSone game into your PS3, it will look the same as you always remembered it and on some televisions you have to change the aspect ratio from 16:9 to 4:3. No up-scaling for PS2 titles either, but a logo does appear that enables the Sixaxis to emulate the Dual shock functions – sans rumble.

OLD GAMES AND MOVIES ARE REGION LOCKED

While the PS3 enables you to play Playstation 3 games imported from any territory (Blu-rays remain region-locked), your DVDs and PSone/PS2 titles will still only play on the machine region they are encoded for.

PSP-STYLE FIRMWARE UPDATES REQUIRED TO PLAY LAUNCH GAMES

Genji: Days Of The Blade, *Ridge Racer 7* and *Resistance: Fall Of Man* all required firmware updates to version 1.02 before they could be played. The update shipped on the disc so there was no need for any downloading.

INTERNAL MEMORY CARDS FOR BACKWARDS COMPATIBLE GAMES

By now you're probably aware of the adaptor that enables you transfer saves from your old PlayStation memory cards to the PS3 but for new saves you must create an internal memory card for that system. From the XMB you can create a PSone or PS2 memory card and store all further saves on the HDD.

NO LAUNCH GAMES USE PSP

None of the launch games require the use of a PSP for any purpose – we assume PSP functionality will come later in the PS3's lifespan.

newsflashes

READY TO LAUNCH?

Europe has finally received details of expected PS3 launch games. *Call Of Duty 3, Marvel: Ultimate Alliance, Tony Hawk's Project 8, Blazing Angels, Rainbow Six: Vegas, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Ridge Racer 7, Need For Speed Carbon*, and *Sonic* are just some of the games we can expect on day one.

SCAMSTATION

A note to parents: this Christmas, please do not be fooled by various advertisements appearing around London offering pre-release PS3s. The adverts ask prospective owners to spend a four and a half minutes on the phone - costing them a total of £7.50 - in order to 'secure' their unit. Which is, of course, absolute rubbish, basically.

STILL FIGHTING

Coming on the arse-end of the *Halo* movie cancellation, news of another *Street Fighter* film is wrong on many levels. But that isn't enough to deter Capcom and producing partner Hyde Park from creating the new film - which focuses on Chun Li - to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the first game.

INTERNET KILLS MAGAZINE

Official PlayStation Magazine discontinued

IN what's surely something of a surprise move, Ziff Davis Media has chosen to discontinue *Official US PlayStation Magazine* next month, due to its plans to expand into online digital media. The news is unexpected, given how closely it followed the PS3's launch. But with Sony's online network enabling users access to the newest trailers and demos first; third-party publications such as magazines are proving less popular.

Digital distribution is an area Ziff Davis has pursued passionately over the past few years, especially with the 1Up.com website (and the *1Up Show* and podcast respectively). It therefore comes as no surprise the company is continuing down this avenue. However, what is surprising is that Ziff Davis is launching *Games For Windows: The Official Magazine* in partnership with Microsoft, no doubt capitalising on Xbox Live-related features.

That said, Ziff Davis did post disappointing third-quarter results, with the decline attributed to gamers favouring online media outlets more than magazines. This sort of news may have you questioning Next3's future, given the nature of our free disk and the fact we're a magazine publication. The news has no implication on UK magazines, especially Next3. We're here to stay.

In fact, we have some exciting new developments planned that we're sure our readers will appreciate – the first is our brand new fully supported website. You can expect constant updates and original media leading up to and beyond the PS3 launch. Be sure to drop by the forum and let us know what you think.

RENTAL WRATH

Sony bites back at Microsoft's online rental service

MICROSOFT certainly didn't do itself any favours last month in the fanboy console war when it revealed plans to launch an online film and TV rental service for Xbox Live subscribers – much like the one Sony has been planning on the Playstation 3. This was obviously nothing more than a pre-emptive strike on Microsoft's part – an effort to combat what will surely be a broader and better service on the PS3. We're sure of this in part thanks to Sony's service not being limited to which PS3 model you own.

Microsoft, on the other hand, has limited its service to premium units, with films costing $3.99, back catalogues $2.99 and TV shows $1.99 a pop. Unfortunately, it means anyone without a hard drive is going to be cut out of that rental loop. This clearly put the rage into Sony spokesperson Dave Karraker, who responded: "Playstation 3's content is designed for everyone to enjoy right out of the box, no matter which configuration you purchase".

He continues: "We would never segregate or shut out any of our consumers from our entertainment experience because they didn't buy the top-of-the-line system. Both Playstation 3 versions available on November 17 include hard drives for downloading content." This does raise an interesting question regarding Sony's rental service, however. With the core unit shipping with a 20GB hard drive, does this mean we should expect downloads not to exceed that limit? You'll know as soon as we do.

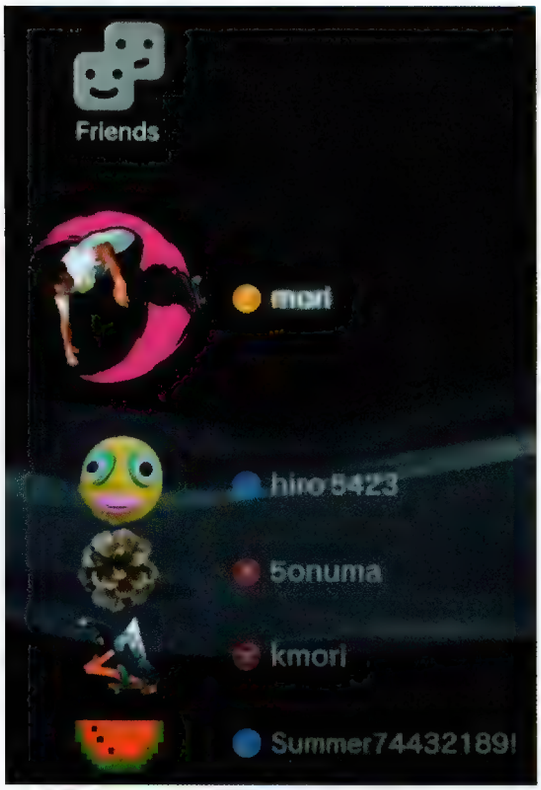
KARRAKER, KEN AND CO

Say hello to Sony's new PR man. He has balls

Dave Karraker is not a name you'll be accustomed to yet. Joining Sony one week prior to TGS, one might say he jumped in at the deepest end - or that he has balls. Having represented Martha Stewart during her incarceration, we'd opt for the latter. As new senior director of corporate communications for Sony, his role is public relations - hopefully putting a new face on the arrogant and narrow-minded tone that has plagued Sony this past year.

SINGLE SIGN-IN

Sony squashes multiple online account rumours



TED Price recently kicked up a fuss when he wrongly revealed that *Resistance: Fall Of Man* will not use the PS3s central buddy list – but instead use its own in-game friends list.

Thoughts of more games following this trend quickly grew, but Dan Brooke, the UK producer for *Resistance*, refuted this in an interview with GamesIndustry.biz. He stated, "[that] *Resistance* uses the PlayStation online ID to sign into the game. There is no separate login for *Resistance* and the online ID you create will be the same one you use for all titles."

The original news terrorised many with thoughts of having to think of brand new usernames for every game they own. One such person was Microsoft's Andre Vrignaud.

Speaking via his blog, Vrignaud stated: "Even though I already have a 'Sony ID', I may have to create a new '*Resistance* ID' to play. And then start thinking about just how broken the experience is when you try to invite someone to a game. Do you send it via the *Resistance* UI? What screen name do I send it to? If I want to add you to my 'Sony ID' friends list, do I need to send you an in-game message to ask you what your real 'Sony ID' name is?"

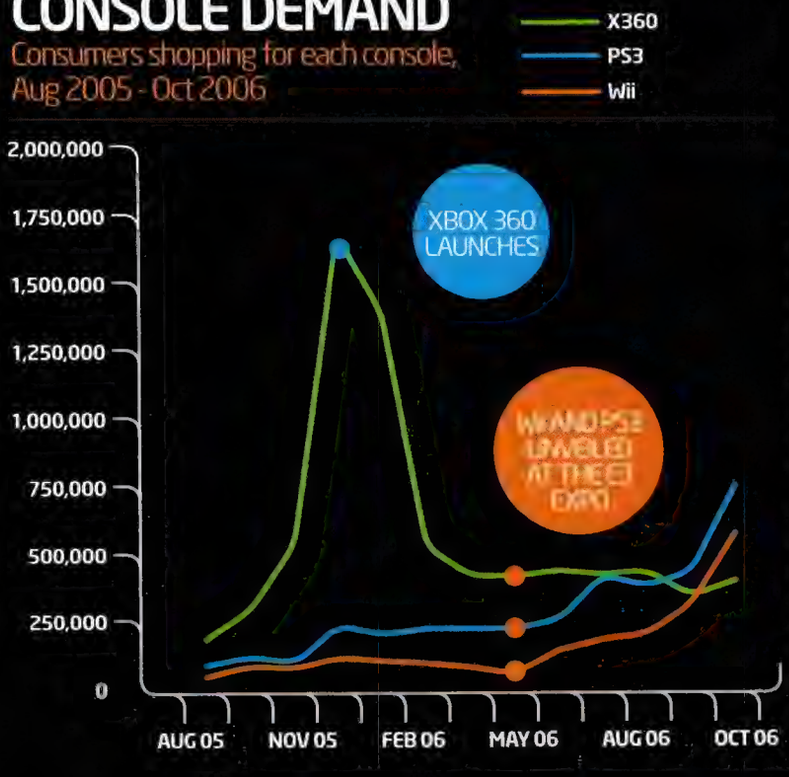
Suffice it to say Vrignaud and co no longer need to worry about such things.

A RETRACTION

IN ISSUE 4 OF NEXT3, IN OUR 'EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT' NEWS FEATURE, WE LISTED URBAN-LUX.COM AS ONE OF THE WEBSITES YOU COULD IMPORT A PS3 FROM. THIS INFORMATION IS INACCURATE. URBAN-LUX IS TAKING PRE-ORDERS FOR PS3 FOR ITS UK RELEASE NEXT YEAR IN MARCH, BUT IT WON'T IMPORT UNITS. WE WOULD LIKE TO APOLOGISE TO URBAN-LUX AND TO SONY FOR ANY TROUBLE THIS MAY HAVE CAUSED.

US VIDEOGAME CONSOLE DEMAND

Consumers shopping for each console, Aug 2005 - Oct 2006



SURVEY SERVES UP

Statistics a little bit dodgy

AROUND half of US consumers who considered buying a Playstation 3 last month expected the price to be far lower than it actually is... apparently. This supposed news came from a survey report that appeared online last month, conducted by analysts at www.blog.compete.com. The results reveal some surprising numbers.

48 per cent of prospective Playstation 3 customers expected the console to retail at a price under $300 – much like the PS2 did at release in 2000. When the actual retail price was revealed to them, 73 per cent of all gamers and 59 per cent of those considering buying one thought it was too expensive. However, the survey did reveal that Sony fans are apparently more loyal than Nintendo fans – with a mere 39 per cent of GameCube owners considering buying a Wii compared to a respectable 63 per cent of PS2 owners contemplating the purchase of a Playstation 3.

However, as good as that news sounds, it is worth treating the information with a certain level of suspicion. What the survey doesn't reveal is how many people actually took part; how long the survey ran for and when that was; who the key demographic was and various other salient pieces of information. The methodology used to conduct the report is therefore definitely worth considering – and the results? Worthy of a pinch of salt.

next3 media
the BIG screen

High-definition gaming at its best

DO YOU WANT TO PHONE A FRIEND?

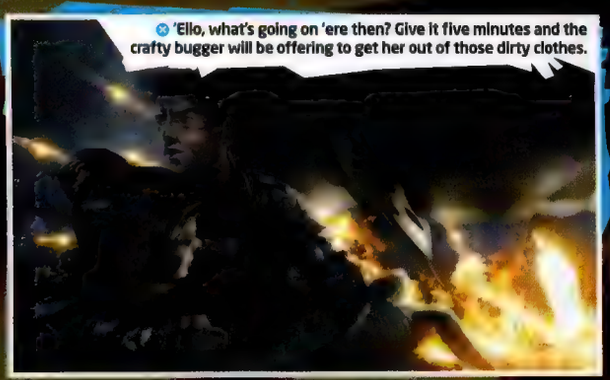
ALONE IN THE DARK: NEAR DEATH INVESTIGATION

OUT: TBA 2007

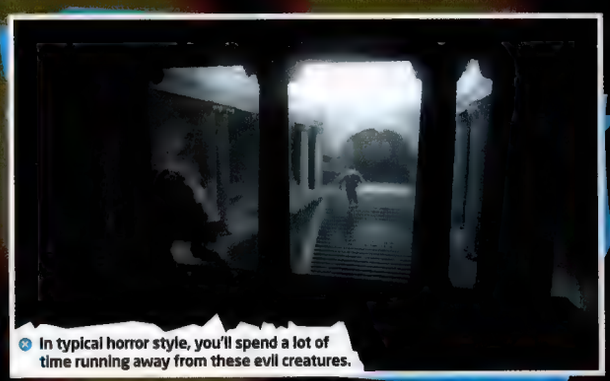
ABOUT// Edward Carnby is a funny man. Not funny, haha funny, but strange funny. Quite exactly how he's managed to turn up in an adventure set over 100 years after his first outing is beyond us. What's baffling us further is how he looks even younger now than he ever has. If you check out the screenshot you'll see just how good he's looking.

The excitement is building around *Alone In The Dark*. We were always excited about Carnby's return, but the knowledge that French outfit, Eden Studios is approaching this from a new angle and doing interesting things with the series. For example, the narrative is to be delivered in episodes, akin to something like *24* or, oh I dunno, *Sex In The City*. Those pesky in-game menus have been done away with, as well as leaving things like weapon selection down to real action in real time.

It all sounds lovely doesn't it? It doesn't just sound lovely though, it looks the part too. Have a gander; it's one of the most stylish titles we've seen. Granted, much of the action will be fairly scripted – this is a horror story, after all – but what we've seen is not only lavish and exciting, but damn smooth as well. While for many the *Resident Evil*-style controls may be a bit of a turn-off, there are plenty of situations that demand an additional control system, leaving us looking at a game with huge promise.



'Ello, what's going on 'ere then? Give it five minutes and the crafty bugger will be offering to get her out of those dirty clothes.



In typical horror style, you'll spend a lot of time running away from these evil creatures.

newsflashes

THE BOY WHO CRIED PLAYSTATION 3

Not even the mighty Kaz Hirai can get his hands on a PS3, apparently. With the slightly depressing news that Japanese quotas have taken a hit in the recent shortage issues, there seems little chance that his poor son, who has been gloating at school about having one, will see one any time soon. Boo-hoo.

MAN OF IRON

Marvel fans rejoice, as Sega has managed to snaffle the rights to the latest Marvel franchise, that is *Iron Man*. In conjunction with an upcoming movie and with the well-respected Sega at the helm, you have to bet on it being a good deal better than, say, EA's last effort.

SONY GET READY FOR PROBE

As if Sony didn't have enough on its plate, the US Justice department have issued a statement indicating that the electronics giant is set for a probe regarding the use of SRAM memory across their electronics division. Used in the PS3's CPU, the exact issue that the DOJ have with the PS3 is unconfirmed, but Sony seems fully open and willing to comply with the investigation.

NETWORK DETAILS FOR PS3 ANNOUNCED

Free to do what you want?

EVERYONE knows the battle for next-gen supremacy will be won or lost in the online fields and with the announcement of Sony's intent in that area, things are looking a little brighter for would-be Playstation 3 owners.

First off, the free service was listed and now included in the out-of-the-box package will be video and voice messaging as well as a text service. This is in addition to the standard friends list and a message box that allows you to hold all the PS3 goodies sent to you by your mates.

The online gaming element allows you to get online and blast your mates to kingdom come, it also comes with a matching service, scoreboards and a unified lobby that allows everyone in the PS3 world to have their say. In addition to that, it contains a shop service for purchasing game items. Two launch titles announced to use the game shop are *Ridge Racer 7* and *Resistance: Fall of Man*.

The so-called 'casual' game downloads have been promised too; with three ready to play on launch day, namely *Blast Factor, Mainichi* and a free demo of *Ridge Racer 7*. Following the launch, *FIOw, Calling All Cars, Cra$h Carnage Chao$, Lemmings, Kazuo* and *Puzzle* (a very working title) will see the download list, with free demos of every launch title being available for free. Yes, free. In addition to all this, the Games Archives service will be offering a plethora of retro titles.

Other interesting features of the PlayStation Network included scant details of a video content distribution service, something that we're guessing will be along the lines of YouTube, and similarly limited information about the online wallet that, at the moment, requires a credit card. Sadly there were few details about price, so we'll have to wait a little longer to see how much damage it'll do to your real-world wallet.

RETRO A-GO-GO

PSP owners reap PS3 rewards

The games on offer via the Games Archive service on release day are listed below, with ten - yes, count 'em - new downloads every month. Okay, not all of them are stunners, and the thought of two volumes of *MSX* games will appeal to very few people; but hey, ten a month ain't too shabby. At first the focus will be on titles for the PSP, but the PS3 downloads are set to follow shortly after.

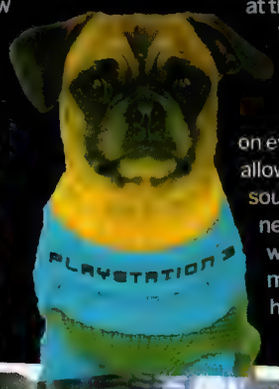
■ **Resident Evil Director's Cut** ■ **Konami Antiques MSX Collection Vol. 1** ■ **Konami Antiques MSX Collection Vol. 2** ■ **Bishi Bashi Special** ■ **Arc The Lad** ■ **Jumping Flash!** ■ **Hotshots Golf 2** ■ **Silent Bomber** ■ **Tekken 2** ■ **Mr Driller**

WOOF WOOF

Yellow Dog Linux 5.0 officially announced for PS3

THERE'S been speculation about this for a good few months now; however, the official announcement that the PS3 will be supporting Linux Yellow Dog 5.0 has been confirmed by both Sony and creator Terra Soft. What this means in reality for the console is that your PS3 will become, for all intents and purposes, a fully functioning PC. To be introduced to the market in three stages, the Yellow Dog Operating System has been built in conjunction with the PS3 and will, after the initial rollout, be distributed free. Very much covering the bases in terms of ease, the YD OS can be installed and used by even the most inexperienced of users and features both quick and advanced install modes.

While the ability to develop for the PS3 via the gameOS won't be available as standard, garage developers will be given the opportunity to download a more advanced version to develop applications and games at a later date. While the power of the PS3 is unlikely to compete with anything at the higher end of the PC market, it should fare very favourably with most home desktop PCs. Running on every Playstation 3 and allowing users access to sound, video, internet and networking applications, we're wondering if this means the end of the home PC. Probably not just yet, eh?



KILLER APPS

What Yellow Dog Linux Means for you

Here's a run down of some of the 2000-strong applications YDL will offer:

- Advanced calculator
- Stickies
- Text editor
- Thunderbird mail system with address book
- Office suite including PDF management
- GIMP image manipulation program
- XChat IRC chat program
- Firefox
- Virtual Network Computing desktop sharing application
- Rhythmbox integrated music management application

POWER HUNGRY

The PS3 is far from eco friendly

According to Sony, the Playstation 3 is the most power-hungry console ever made, sucking up an astounding 380 watts. That's the same as a top-end stand mixer and exactly double the Xbox 360's 160 watts. However, what is amazing is that the PS2 utilised a mere 45 watts, the same as a low light household bulb. The Wii is likely to be of a similar drain on your energy bill, weighing in at next to nothing, but will require being on 24/7 to make the most of.

The most immediate effect of the PS3's huge power drain is a hike in your energy usage and subsequently your electricity bill. Our best estimates, working on an average of 1.5 to 2 hours usage a day, equate to about £30–£40 per year, not to mention the drain on the environment.

BEST BUY OFFERS 360S RATHER THAN PS3S

Could the PS3 launch have a positive effect on Microsoft?

BEST Buy, the gigantic stateside electronics store is offering would-be PS3 gamers an X360 to compensate for the shortfall in Sony units during the US launch period. The retailers, who were always expecting a major supply deficit, offered punters a deal that, should they really want to get on the next-gen bandwagon, saved them $60 in a buy-two-get-one-free offer on Xbox 360 games.

The deal that ran from 17 to 19 November, allowed gamers to purchase three Xbox 360 titles for the price of two, if they bought Microsoft's next-gen console. This hasn't gone down too well, and we imagine that with less than 5,000 PS3s to spread across their enormous web of stores, not to mention online orders, there were more than a few ex-Sony fan boys walking out of stores with an Xbox 360.

What good is an Xbox 360 when what you really want is a PS3? This may seem like Microsoft bashing – it's not by the way – but punters that plump for a 360 rather than waiting a few more weeks for more PS3s are shooting themselves in the foot. If you want a Playstation 3, just be patient, it'll be worth it.

AFTERTHOUGHT

JUST ANNOUNCED

NEW GAMES

CALLING ALL CARS

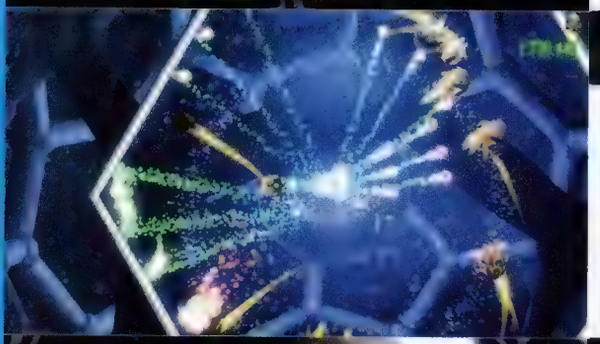
THE WHAT// Touted by the man himself as an even mix of *Bomberman* and *Twisted Metal*, *Calling All Cars*, a title formerly known as *Criminal Crackdown*, certainly looks to have the character of a typical Jaffe title. What we have to look forward to with *CAC* is a downloadable game that is firmly focused on four-way fun. Amongst the first of the downloadable content, we are pleased to see – apart from anything else – that Sony is demonstrating its commitment to the Playstation 3 marketplace. Being a fairly basic affair, *Calling All Cars* involves catching crooks and collecting the reward money before your buddies can get hold of them.

THE WHO// David Jaffe. While his previous exploits included *Twisted Metal* and *God Of War*, *Calling All Cars* is something of a departure from the norm for the outspoken Sony bod. Having apparently made the decision to move away from single-player games – declining to get on board with a third *God Of War* title – Jaffe's future could well be firmly entrenched in the online download aspect of Playstation 3. Jaffe's obviously had the idea for this title floating around his head for some time and despite a few initial surprises at the throwaway nature of the game, we're looking forward to this first of Jaffe's brain farts with some enthusiasm.

BEOWULF

THE WHAT// The Sixth Century tale of *Beowulf* is about as good as high-octane narrative gets and in all honesty, it hasn't been bettered since. This action adventure charts the progress of the titular character as he searches for Grendel and his horrid mother to put an end to the ravaging of Gotland, an area now under Swedish dominion.

THE WHO// German outfits 4HEAD and 3D-IO are getting together to produce *Beowulf* with the latter dealing with the art side of the project. While there's no publisher on board and the two companies aren't well known for their videogame efforts, an action adventure based on the age-old story of *Beowulf* could be best dealt with by Germans.



BLAST FACTOR

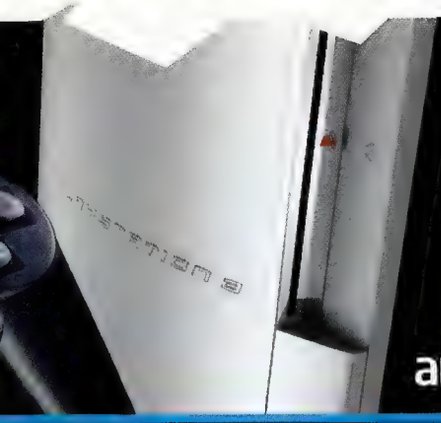
THE WHAT// This is Bizarre Creations' *Geometry Wars* in all but the name. Although we'll probably get told otherwise by lots of angry Sony PRs, but take a look at the screenshots, what do you think? Of course, whether it turns out to be as good as the aforementioned 360 classic arcade title, we'll have to wait and see.

THE WHO// Bluepoint Games – a relatively new kid on the game development block – has taken charge here, with *Blast Factor* being its very first game. It is a fairly straightforward affair, so we reckon Bluepoint's inexperience shouldn't really have too much of an impact on this *Geometry Wars* rip-off.

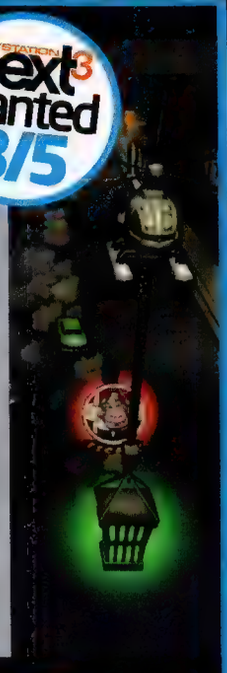
DARK SECTOR

THE WHAT// A first-person shooter set in outer space sees you bombing around spaceships in your spangly new armoured suit. This outfit has the amazing ability to morph to match your situation and also houses a huge selection of weapons. It is a brooding thriller of a title with plenty of stealth elements included too.

THE WHO// Digital Extremes, co-creator of one of the most revered shooters of all time, namely *Unreal*, is on board with *Dark Sector* and with that kind of pedigree, you have to expect something great. However, moving forward to next-gen gaming, we have to expect a little more than just a regular shooter.



Keeping you bang up-to-date with all the latest game announcements on Playstation 3



THE GOOD// The firm focus on the multiplayer aspect is heartening, as it's almost impossible to create a poor four-player experience. This will probably be most people's entry point to downloadable games and it looks to be a more than competent start for Sony. The colourful visuals and pacey gameplay should appeal to those less interested in the processing grunt of the PS3 than good, old-fashioned arcade gameplay. Running 1080p at 60 fps, *CAC* is no slouch and with a split screen and online multiplayer, we're hoping this original IP will give the download service a great start.

THE BAD// With only ten vehicles to begin with, options could be a little limited. Hopefully these will be added to in the fullness of time though, so don't panic just yet. The other question mark hanging over *Calling All Cars* at the minute has less to do with the actual game, as we're wondering if the eccentric Jaffe has completely lost his marbles. He's moving from one of the most impressive PS2 series to *Calling All Cars*, a five minute blast-a-thon title without even the merest hint of epic about it. Hmmm...

THE GOOD// You're unlikely to find a better narrative in the videogame world and this tale of a troubled warrior in search of redemption may have been done many times since, but the original remains the best. It's not known how much the game will stick to the story yet, but we hope it'll be pretty close.

THE BAD// The curse of the tie-in may mean an awful translation for the PS3. If anything is likely to ruin the story, the blend of an inexperienced development team and a separate art crew will. If it bears no resemblance to the original material, we'd be annoyed.

THE GOOD// This shooter is set in a Petri dish and allows you to use the surface of the dish to create tidal waves to destroy your enemies. Leading us to think *Blast Factor* may have more complex mechanics than most shooters. Online ranking and tilt control should add an extra layer of depth as well.

THE BAD// Hey, it's *Geometry Wars* in a Petri dish. If you don't like *Geometry Wars* you're unlikely to find it appealing. If you dislike science or geometry, you'll more than likely hate it. However, if you dislike *Geometry Wars* but like Petri dishes, you may like it.

THE GOOD// Although *Dark Sector* is currently only at the tech demo stage, the concepts that have been put forward are pretty sweet. Okay, so many of the more technical aspects are missing at the moment – most notably some rather lazy animation – but style-wise it's a winner.

THE BAD// While it may be a stylish, menacing title, there are a few things that ring alarm bells. The first is the inclusion of D3Publisher; the second is that despite Digital Extremes' history with *Unreal*, their last shooter, *Pariah* failed to meet expectations.

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Everything you need to know broken into numerical factoids

0 Number of pre-ordered PS3s at Play-Asia

1.7 Amount in billions of dollars lost in Sony's videogames division this year

3 Number of PS3s in the office

5.0 Version number of Linux that the PS3 runs

6 Number of PS3 titles we have in the office, including *Resistance*, *Ridge Racer* and *Lair*, with plenty more on the way

10 Anticipated life expectancy of the PS3's Sixaxis controllers

16 Amount in billions of dollars that Sony turned over last quarter

20 Amount of extra hours in the Playstation 3 version of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*

25 Size in gigabytes of the Blu-rays being filled by current games in development

50 Amount in dollars that the Sixaxis retails for

80 Rumoured amount in pounds that the Sixaxis controller will retail for. Note: this is complete balderdash

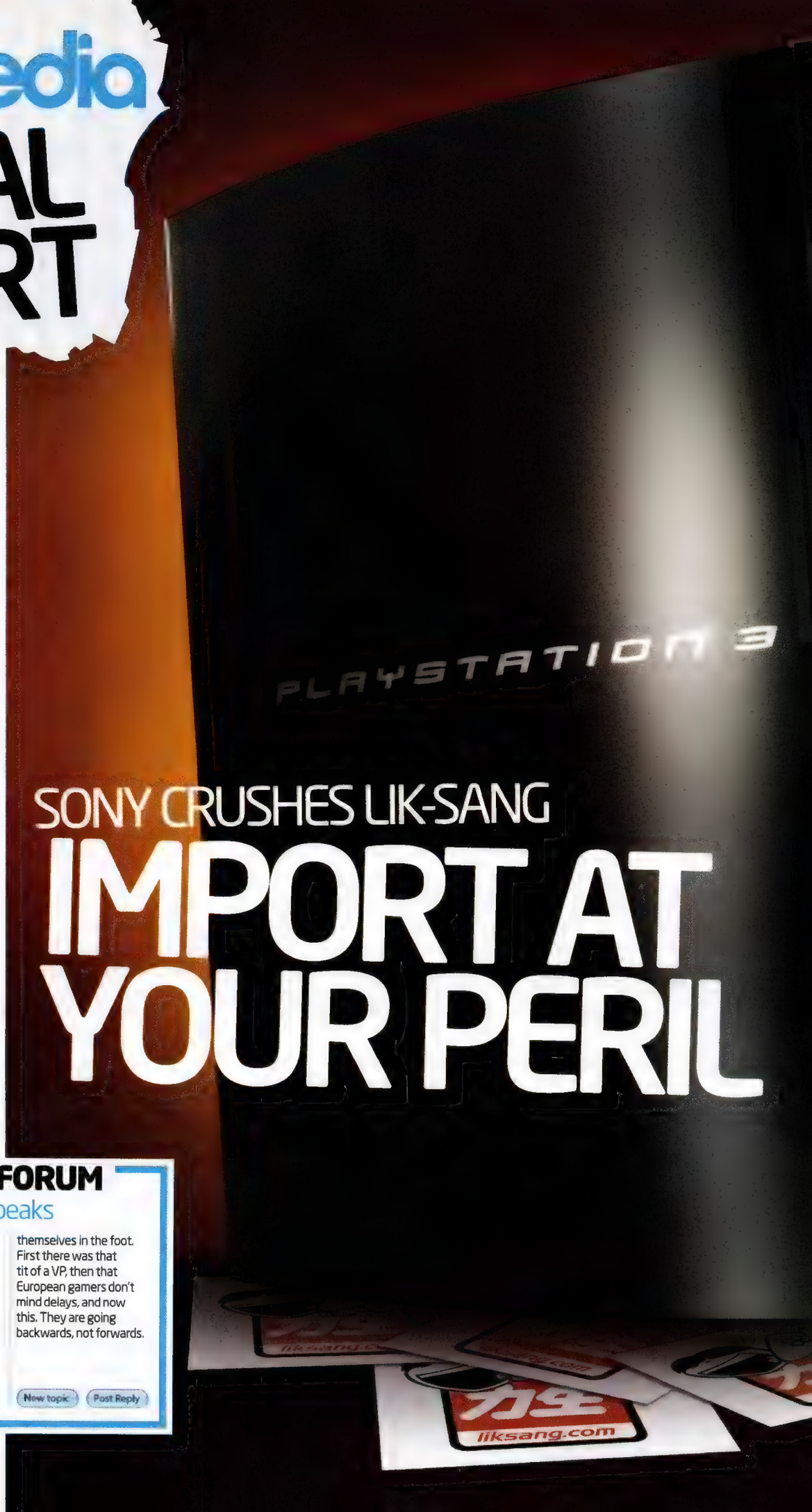
777 Amount in millions of dollars that the games industry made in the last month

5,980 Amount in Yen that both *Resistance* and *Genji* retail for

80,000 The amount of PS3s available to buy in Japan at launch. This was supposed to be 100,000

500,000 Amount of copies of *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* to be bundled with PS3s

SPECIAL REPORT



SONY CRUSHES LIK-SANG

IMPORT AT YOUR PERIL

THE news that the popular videogame-and-gadget importer, Lik-Sang had been crushed by the rather persistent wheels of the Sony legal machine, came as something of a surprise to us. While the electronics giant has been making noises and puffing its chest out about import consoles for some time, somehow none of us really believed it'd actually get anywhere, let alone to the point of shutting down one of the best-loved importing sites around. How did it happen then? How did a string of unsuccessful and ineffective legal proceedings turn into a highly decisive, not to mention significant, court action?

The eventual downfall of Lik-Sang, otherwise known as Pacific Game Technology LTD is something of a saga, and one pretty much ignored until the final decision to close the site. Concerned exclusively with the sale of PSPs to the European market, Sony maintained that Lik-Sang were infringing it's copyright by selling Sony goods outside the market they were designated for. Precedent for the case came from similar actions brought by Davidoff and Levi against A&G Imports and Tesco respectively who didn't receive explicit rights to sell wares outside the designated regions. An open-and-shut case then, given the weight of precedent.

Indeed it was, but with the closure of Lik-Sang, the company claimed that several major players in the Sony hierarchy – most notably managing director, Ray Maguire; the UK marketing director, Alan Duncan and creative director, Chris Sorrel had all purchased import PSPs from the site. Sony claim that all such orders were

WORD FROM THE FORUM

The Next3 community speaks

PS3SonyPS3 Ah well, never thought it was a very good site anyways.

MGSOCKS1 This was a surprise move by Sony. They just need to remember not to piss off more gamers when they are starting to forget all of the negativity toward PS3.

Bonders99 This is hilarious. Why even make a statement like that? It makes Sony look rather amateur. Like every director had to buy something for investigatory reasons.

Tom479 Sony is just repeatedly shooting themselves in the foot. First there was that tit of a VP, then that European gamers don't mind delays, and now this. They are going backwards, not forwards.

New topic | Post Reply

on an investigatory basis. Excuse us for guffawing, but erm... guffaw. Lik-Sang's only defence was based on a similar case being brought against them in Hong Kong, pleading forum non conveniens due to the similarity of the cases. Neglecting to turn up for the case, however, the Hong Kong-based importers pretty much consigned themselves to a legal battering. The fact that no other importers were attacked by Sony also raises the issue of why. Lik-Sang are amongst the biggest importers, but there are other, more viable targets out there and the legal effort taken to down Lik-Sang could well have been better spread amongst all importers. It certainly smells a bit fishy.

The follow up to the judge's decision is perhaps more telling with what is clearly a stunned and irate Lik-Sang issuing statements deriding Sony and the method with which they operate. The backlash from Sony was uncharacteristically vehement, dashing the claims that Sony top brass used Lik-Sang to import PSPs just days after the Japanese launch. Indeed, Sony went on to say that it had little to do with the closure of the site, saying that it had not been paid the sum deemed appropriate by the courts and adding a reminder that Lik-Sang had not appeared in court, so therefore did not incur any legal costs. This claim was subsequently rebutted by Lik-Sang's marketing manager, Pascal Clarysse, who maintained that the Hong Kong-based importer had "spent over a year to vigorously contest the UK court's jurisdiction." All a little confusing. However, it would seem that Sony has missed numerous challenges to the case from Lik-Sang who attempted to refute the claims that it was targeting the UK market, using the fact that the name Lik-Sang only has meaning in Chinese. It's worth noting that this argument was thrown out swiftly.

Regardless of the sordid details of the case, the future of the import market has been irrevocably changed by this decision. Thankfully though, the ruling doesn't prevent any of us heading over to the States or Japan and picking up a PS3 for our own use. Game imports haven't been affected by the ruling, so anyone who's dedicated enough to have purchased a Playstation 3 can still get software for it. What it does mean is that import websites will run the risk of certain, immediate and successful court action should they continue to trade with Sony hardware.

The biggest question is exactly what proceedings like this do for Sony. For a company built on trust and reputation, this case can't do anything to boost sales and the general consensus is that perhaps this time it has gone too far.

BULLY BOYS

Opinion from the importers

Most of the online importers we spoke to declined to comment to any great extent, but one or two gave some particularly insightful comments regarding Sony's prolonged punishment of Lik-Sang. One well-respected outfit even suggested the debacle was not over PSP imports, but due to the sale of modchips for Sony's beloved PSP. Controversial, eh?

It is unfortunate that Lik-Sang has closed its doors. There aren't many operators in the import market who are able to efficiently serve a global customer base and its closing was a major loss for consumers. - *NCSX.com*

We don't know the full story or background of why Sony went after Lik-Sang when there were other companies in Hong Kong that also shipped PSP systems to the UK and Europe. As far as we know, no one else was sued and other Hong Kong-based companies are continuing normal business operations. - *estarland.com*

We are not affiliated with Lik-Sang and we are thus unable to give any comment in their situation neither does it affect us. - *Play-Asia*

ANY PUBLICITY...

Battle of the press releases

Sony Said

Sony Computer Entertainment successfully sued Pacific Game Technology (Holding) Limited (one of who's company trading names is Lik-Sang.com) for infringing our Intellectual property rights. 'Lik-Sang' did not contest this case (meaning; they did not turn up and therefore incurred no legal costs). We have been awarded substantial costs against Lik-Sang that have not been paid. We would therefore strongly deny that our actions have had anything to do with this website closing (*we assume the legal entity is still trading) and would suggest that this release is sour grapes on behalf of Lik-Sang that is aimed to belittle Sony Computer Entertainment and the British judicial system that found against them.

Sony means

"What!? What have we done? All we did was follow the law. We're actually doing you lot a favour, you should be glad. We haven't even got our money yet!"

Lik-Sang Said

As of today, Lik-Sang.com will not be in the position to accept any new orders and will cancel and refund all existing orders that have already been placed. The staff of Lik-Sang will make sure that nobody will get hurt in the crossfire of this ordeal. Lik-Sang strongly disagrees with Sony's opinion that their customers need this kind of protection

"Today is Sony Europe victory about PSP, tomorrow is Sony Europe's ongoing pressure about PS3. It's the beginning of the end... of the World as we know it"

"Blame it on Sony. That's the latest dark spot in their shameful track record as gaming industry leader. The Empire finally 'won', few dominating retailers from the UK probably will rejoice the news, but everybody else in the gaming world lost something today."

Lik-Sang means

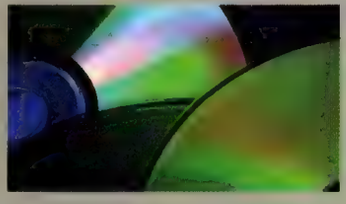
newsflashes

CREED KEEPS US WAITING

First we thought it was a PS3 exclusive, then we had to share and now we have to wait as Ubisoft has confirmed that its exciting action adventurer, *Assassin's Creed* may not grace consoles until as late as 2008. As part of a revenue report to investors, Ubisoft said that both *Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway* and *Assassin's Creed* would now strengthen profits for the fiscal year 2007-08, which runs from April 2007 through to March 2008. But it's not all bad news – it was also announced that a follow-up to the hugely successful *GRAW* would appear on their Q1 release.

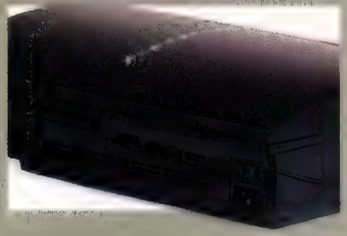
NEW HD FROM NEC

Still wondering if Blu-ray or HD-DVD will win the next-gen format war? Well perhaps you should consider buying a DVD player that's fitted with a new chip from NEC. Essentially creating a multi-format DVD player, NEC claims that the chip would enable hardware to accommodate content recorded on both formats and is hoping to begin shipping to manufacturers as early as April 2007. It's unconfirmed whether any major electronics companies plan to incorporate the chip with its products; manufacturers such as Pioneer and LG previously announced plans to produce players that support both formats, but haven't elaborated on when or how.



HDMI LEVELS UP

It's recently been announced that the PS3 will be the first machine on the market to feature the HDMI 3.1 format. This is said to double HDMI bandwidth, allowing the console to display deeper colour, support new digital audio formats and offers an optional connector for portable devices like digital cameras. HDTVs with HDMI 1.3 will be available in early 2007.



CURRENCY AND CONTROL ON PS3

How to buy downloads on Playstation 3

AFTER emptying the contents of your wallet into a local games retailer's cash register this March you might not have too much left to buy downloads. However, if you do manage to balance the budget and have a few pounds to spare, the electronics giant has told us how we can spend them. When unveiling the Playstation Store in the States last month, Sony revealed that you could make online purchases either with or without a credit card. Those without flexible friends will be able to buy a Playstation Store card in retail outlets to use like a gift voucher.

With the Xbox 360, Microsoft has opted to convert cash into points that can then be used to buy items on Live, but we like the idea of using real money in the Store as it keeps all of the costs upfront and it's very simple to see exactly how much you're spending. Not only can you control how much money you spend, but also who has access to the material purchased.

Parents will be able to use a credit card to allocate their kids (or spend-heavy spouse) an allowance and all downloadable items that are purchased will come with an age rating attached; this can then be used to block kids from playing or viewing inappropriate material. Whether parents will ever use these controls is debatable, but at least the option is there.

Once you've bought a game through Sony's Playstation Store you can share it with four mates. The game purchase is logged on the network and, if you're feeling generous, you can sign in to the PS Store at a friend's house and re-download the game for free. If the title is an online multiplayer game, only one of you can use it at a time, but if it's an offline game then five of you can play to your heart's content.

Leaderboards lead the way

NO GAMERSCORES FOR PS3

If you play on Xbox Live, we bet that – at least once – you've been drawn into the virtual willy waving contest that is the Xbox 360 Gamerscore war – Microsoft's surprisingly successful method of awarding points for completing in-game goals. It's so successful in fact, that many predicted Sony would mimic the system for the Playstation 3, along with its very own version of 360 Achievements called, Entitlements. However, it appears Sony has chosen to tread its own path and opt for individual game leaderboards instead.

When quizzed on the subject of an online rewards system, executive vice president of Sony Computer Entertainment America, Jack Tretton, said: "I think it will be game-centric. It's very difficult to draw analogies between your success on *SOCOM* and your success on *Madden*. *Madden* players care about peoples' success on *Madden*." So it seems that rather than a single unified Gamerscore you'll be ranked on how good you are at a specific game, which should make things like Matchmaking that much easier.

Don't be a Gamerscore Whore

It might sound a bit strange to someone who is yet to be tempted onto Xbox Live, but Gamerscores are kind of a big deal for Xbox Live gamers – the bigger the score the bigger the bragging rights. So obsessed with the size of scores, teams have been formed to play around the clock, bugs have been exploited to increase point tallies and the online leaderboard is monitored closer than a Broadmoor inmate. But when is enough, enough? Some developers are even offering the chance to buy Points or Achievements, which defeats the object of Gamerscores altogether. What happened to gaming for sheer enjoyment? In many ways we welcome the lack of PS3 Gamerscores as it might mean that people are rewarded for games they're good at and not just for knowing how to exploit the system.

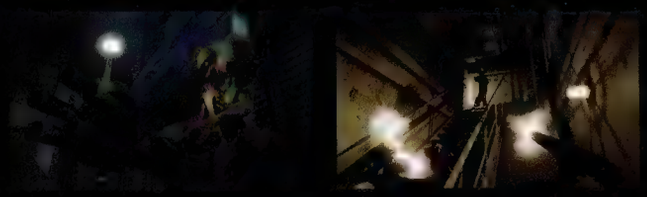
AFTER THOUGHT

6 THINGS WE LOVE

6 things we love about...

The Darkness

A SHINING LIGHT ON THE PS3



1 // Army of one When two arms just aren't enough, Jack Estacado can go all Mr Tickle and use his tentacle-like Demon Arms to attack enemies and pick up objects from afar. Who says men can't multi-task?

2 // See and saw When you've got supernatural powers it would be foolish not to abuse them – if you're tired of doing all the work yourself just summon up a miniature saw-wielding demon and direct him to the foe you want carving up.

3 // Telly addict All that vengeance seeking can really take it out of you so if you fancy a spot of R&R, simply spot one of the numerous television sets located through the game and watch a full length TV show or even an entire movie.

4 // Vo selecta Forget mo-cap, *The Darkness* is all about 'vo-cap' – a technology that has been designed to allow for more realistic emotion on artificial characters. The different expressions and looks of fear are a treat (or should that be terror?) to behold.

5 // Ghoulfellas If there are two things we like to kill it's monsters and Mafioso and in this game we get to do both. The talented team behind *The Chronicles Of Riddick* have managed to work in a nice range of weapon, melee and supernatural-based attacks to get the job done.

6 // Multi-slayer No next-gen game can turn up to the party without a decent selection of online multiplayer modes and *The Darkness* boasts a full complement. Playing as a human or one of Jack's Darklings you can pwned yourself some noobs – yeah, we're struggling to understand the lingo too.

next3media the BIG screen

High-definition gaming at its best

FEEL IT COMING IN THE AIR TONIGHT

MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

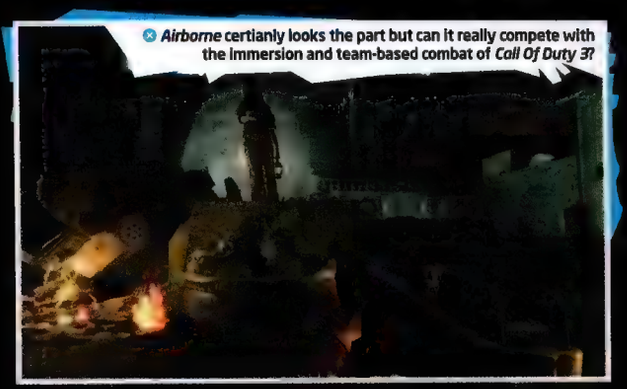
OUT: 2007

ABOUT// Imagine one of the most frightening situations you've ever been in, okay, got one? Now imagine you're at the door of a plane, several hundred miles in the air looking down. You've no training, no experience, but there's a voice bellowing in your ear to jump. Unless you've had a very traumatic life, we're sure the experiences of Private Boyd Travers trumps any tale of woe we can muster and in *Medal Of Honor: Airborne*, you can find out just how unnerving they really are.

Airborne depicts the first combat parachute drop in American history and spans through to the end of the war. Looking to put a new spin on the WWII genre, the game allows you to choose your own mission starting point and, with the use of the Sixaxis, guide yourself to any place on the map. This has different benefits, the most significant being that it means it's not in any way linear.

Of course, this depends on you making it to the ground in one piece, as there are measures in place to make it as problematic as possible. Even when you master the landing controls, things don't get much easier as the new AI system, Affordance, relies on making the most of what the battlefield has to offer – find higher ground, better weapons and more cover if you want to win the day.

Many of the gameplay mechanics from *Allied Assault* return alongside some new elements such as customisable weapons and pill popping to regenerate health. So far, what we've seen of *Airborne* is impressive and looks to offer something different from the usual squad-based antics. With visuals on a par with the *Call Of Duty 3*, we've got a feeling you'll really 'fall' for *Airborne* but be sure to check back soon for a full playtest.



Airborne **certianly looks the part but can it really compete with the immersion and team-based combat of *Call Of Duty 3*?**

Why are so many shooters based on WWII? It was the last Good Vs Evil war, of course!

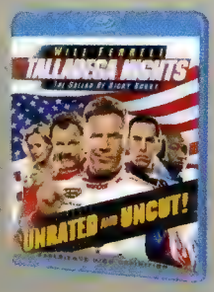
newsflashes

KINGDOM HEARTS III IN DEMAND

It seems the collective whingeing of the Sony fanbase community has had an effect, as with a loud 'kerching' Disney has asked for a sequel to be produced by Square Enix. Although the project isn't set in stone just yet, if Disney gets its way – and you've got to expect them to – *Final Fantasy XIII* director, Motomu Toriyama will be on board with the game sometime soon.

TALLADEGA NIGHTS PS3 BUNDLE

For the first half million PS3s to be sold, Sony has very generously declared that a Blu-ray will be packaged with the PS3 bundle. The first to be announced is, *Talladega Nights: The Ballad Of Ricky Bobby*. While this may not be the best comedy film in the world, it does indicate a healthy degree of enthusiasm for the format and, with any luck, will enable viewers to make a judgement about the quality of the next-gen format for themselves.



SONY'S FINANCIAL HIGHS, LOWS AND WOES (AGAIN!)

Sony has reported a rather miserable bag of results for the fiscal period ending 30 September 2006. Having taken losses to the tune of $429 million on the recall of nearly 10 million laptop batteries and citing the cost of the PS3's development, the only upside was an eight per cent rise in overall revenue, bringing its predicted annual revenue to rise to $69.5 billion. Poor Sony.

SONY

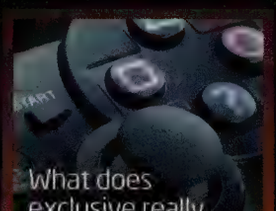
Exclusive is as exclusive does

GTA IV EXCLUSIVE CONTENT

SOURCES close to Rockstar usually turn out to be friends of cousins of mates of someone who bumped into someone that used to clean the bins at the UK-based developer. While we're not expecting this to be any different, the recent leak from one such source has indicated that the 'exclusive' content promised for the PS3 will be along the same lines as what was promised for 360 gamers at X06.

The extra Xbox 360 goodies pledged at the expo amounted to two new areas. It seems that *GTA IV* will be built to enable numerous downloads of that type. In a comment with regards to the title that is due out some time in October next year, Microsoft clarified the situation of extra content, saying it would contain, "exclusive access to two downloadable, epic episodes of *GTA IV* via Xbox Live, each with hours of entirely new gameplay and available only on Xbox 360 just months after the release of the title".

The undisclosed source had just this to say about the PS3 additions: "Think of the world as a large island – the new downloadable areas will be like smaller islands linking into it". With Rockstar's typical reluctance to speak on such a rumour, unfortunately we failed to get a comment from the team, save for a promise of information early next year.



What does exclusive really mean nowadays?

It's difficult to avoid the nagging question; just how exclusive is 'exclusive content' these days? With episodic content and microtransactions becoming even buzzier buzzwords, it's not a fantastic leap of imagination to guess that one day in the not-too-distant future we'll be downloading the Xbox 360's exclusive content for our PS3.

AFTERTHOUGHT

PS3 IN YOUR PALM

Sony reveals PSP functionality

HEAD of hardware development for both the PSP and PS3, Izumi Kawanishi has been waxing lyrical about the joys of a PSP/PS3 Wi-Fi marriage. While we already knew that the PSP could be used as a media viewer, some new information has come to light; most importantly that the PSP will be used to play PS3 games on. This function will initially only be available within ad-hoc range, but there are plans to extend it over the internet. The ability to view and, eventually, play PS3 games on the PSP is only available out of the box with the 60GB PS3, as the 20GB machine doesn't support Wi-Fi. Other gems gleaned from Kawanishi's interview are that despite the lack of Region Free encoding, there are no guarantees – with many titles at least – that Japanese or American titles will work on European PS3s. The final nugget of info was that there will be provision for those who are not on the internet to update their system software via USB Memory Stick.

BACK NOT SO GOOD

PS3 experiencing backwards compatibility problems

WHEN the Xbox 360 arrived in homes this time last year, apart from a spate of over-heating issues, the main complaint levied against it was its less-than-complete list of backwards-compatible titles. In fact on day one, apart from the two *Halo* titles, there weren't many Xbox games worth playing on your next-gen machine, unless of course you were partial to a spot of *Barbie Horse Adventures*, that is. So with the PS3 having both PSone and PS2 hardware wired directly into the system (instead of using emulation software like the Xbox 360) there's no way Sony could make the same mistake, right?

Well, unfortunately just hours after the machine went on sale in Japan, gamers began to complain about backwards compatibility issues and shortly afterwards on its official website, Sony confirmed that several BC titles aren't functioning properly on Playstation 3. Most of the problems are said to relate to audio glitches, while others don't run at all; however, SCE spokesperson Satoshi Fukuoka assured gamers that the issues would be fixed through a series of online patches. Problems with are said to exist with around 200 titles including *Final Fantasy XI*, *Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams* and *Tekken 5*, but while this figure might seem high it accounts for less than 2.5 per cent of the entire PS2 catalogue. With such a huge back catalogue of games (well over 8,000) such small problems are to expected and the fact that the number experiencing problems is so small is actually pretty impressive. Besides, anyone worrying that their favourite PS2 games won't run on their PS3 can probably rest easy, as these problems will no doubt be resolved by the time Sony's new console hits Europe in March.

SONY WON'T GUARANTEE MARCH LAUNCH

Launch problems home and away

THE announcement of the first Playstation 3 delay hit European gamers pretty hard, but when asked in a recent interview serialised on 'semi-official' site Three Speech, Sony Worldwide Studios boss Phil Harrison has refused to offer a guarantee that the console will definitely be here in March. Acknowledging the fact that Sony had failed to meet previous street dates Harrison said, "Given that all of our previous statements about launching in Europe simultaneously with the US and Japan turned out not to be the case, I wouldn't like to make any definitive statements on that."

Worrying words indeed, with American and Japanese gamers already cosying up to their PS3s, now is the time Europeans need the most reassurance. Sony's favourite spin doctor then went on to add "It's not my job to comment on hardware supply issues other than to say some very smart people are working very hard to catch up." As it turns out, it's not just Europeans who have cause for concern as recently a stream of key third-party publishers have announced that their titles will not make the US launch window, with some being canned altogether. Sega was first to speak confirming a delay to the PS3 version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* so it could 'finalise downloadable content', shortly afterwards *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and *F.E.A.R.* (yet to be confirmed) both slipped to the first quarter of 2007. In a separate announcement, EA went one step further and confirmed the cancellation of *NBA Live 07* on the PS3 commenting "our plans for *NBA Live* are very ambitious and we did not want to rush the game this year. We expect that it will available on PS3 next season." Considering all of these games are already (or soon will be) available on the Xbox 360, the reason for the delays seem to point to the rumoured PS3 development difficulties – we just hope there is a large pool of these very smart people at Sony to remedy the problem.

the hot3 list

TEN OF THE BEST. YOU LOVE IT REALLY...

TEN OF THE HAPPIEST GOINGS-ON IN THE WORLD OF PS3

01 WE'VE GOT A PS3

Well, three actually, and the best thing about it? *Revolution*, our snotty-nosed sister mag haven't seen hide nor hair of a Wii. If truth be told, that's not the best thing about it at all, we just like to gloat. Seriously though, the ability to play real, actual games on a real, actual console is truly joyous. With preview/demo code of titles like *Resistance*, *Lair*, *Formula One*, *Virtua Fighter* and *Virtua Tennis* banging around the office, March seems closer than ever.

02 PS3 DOWNLOADS FOR YOUR MATES

If you're lucky enough to have four mates, you'll be able to make the most of the rather surprising announcement that you can now give said PS3-owning chums a little treat in the form of a download share. Once you've downloaded your chosen game, you can make four further downloads to your mates' machines. This unprecedented generosity will no doubt create a bustling owe-u-one culture amongst PS3 gamers.

03 SWEATY MITTS

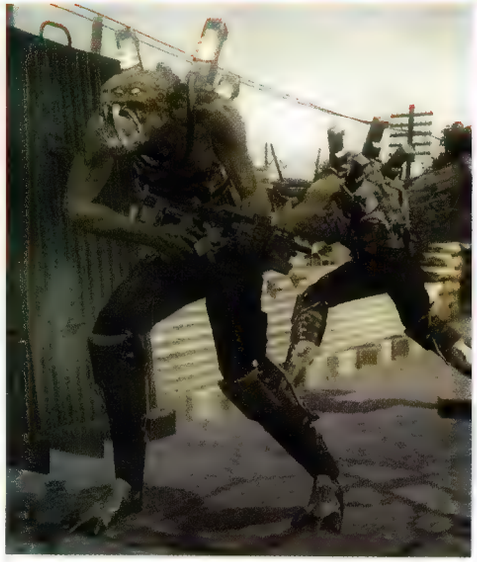
Fat, sweaty gaming fingers? Digits constantly slipping off the D-pad? Combos regularly ruined by a lack of purchase on the face buttons? Well fret no more! The world's first antiperspirant controller should be hitting our shelves near the time of the PS3, giving you no reason to lose online. Unless, of course, you're crap.

04 SIX MILLION UNITS ON THEIR WAY

The firm reassertion from Sony top brass that there will be a guaranteed six million Playstation 3 consoles available by the end of the fiscal year is pretty encouraging and according to a recent interview, this "isn't a difficult task". Of course, knowing Sony, this could be by the end of the financial year in 2010, so let's not all hold our breath just yet.

05 PS3 ONLINE A 'KNOCKOFF'

In the normal course of events, Microsoft ranting about the PS3 is negative. It's just the way of things. But this time, Aaron Greenberg, marketing manager for Xbox Live who stated that the PS3's online service is a knockoff of Xbox Live, is actually working to excite rather than depress the Sony faithful. However, we would be more than happy if this turns out to be the case, as we've been sceptical of Sony's plans from day one.



06 GAMES FILLING BLU-RAYS

It's not just *Resistance* racking up the gigabytes on Blu-ray any more, as many other titles in development are starting to make full use of the storage medium's capacity. Whether this is due to sloppy design or a dedication to giving the consumer the best possible next-generation experience remains to be seen, but we would like to assume the latter.

07 EA PRODUCING 30 PS3 GAMES

While many still don't see publishing behemoth EA as a positive influence in the videogames industry, few can deny its commitment to getting games on to the shelves. Given the relative drought that accompanies the release of a new range of consoles, 30 new titles from one publisher is certainly encouraging. How many of these are original IPs is still to be confirmed, but hey, new games are new games, right?

08 NEW SF MOVIE

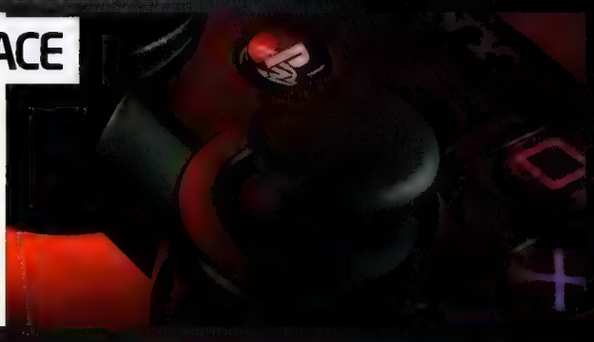
Film industry trade magazine *Variety* has reported on the rather exciting news that a new *Street Fighter* movie is set for production. Anyone who remembers the previous attempt to recreate the magic on the big screen will no doubt be gently weeping into their hands by now, but we have to hope the film that coincides with the 20th anniversary of the seminal 2D fighter makes reasonable viewing. The relatively unknown Justin Marks has been signed up to pen the script, but no other details are available yet.

09 PIMP MY RIDE NOT FOR PS3

Woo-hoo! Yeah! Awesome. One of the lamest franchises ever conceived isn't on its way to the PS3. Usually we're a little upset when titles shun Sony's next-gen console, but thankfully, what can only be an abomination of a game is staying away. Looking like an even mix of *Need For Speed* and *Juiced*, this abysmal racer/pimper is only set to feature on PS2 and Xbox 360. Woo! Yeah! We've not been pimped!

10 SONY TO REPLACE CONTROLLERS

Although you're unlikely to ever need a replacement battery, what with the Sixaxis controller having a ten-year battery life, should one ever die on you completely, Sony is promising to replace it. This offer doesn't extend to normal wear and tear however, so we are doubtful that they will be replacing pads damaged by curry and beer spillages.



RUMOUR CONTROL

Fact or fiction... you decide

1 WII TECHNOLOGY COMING TO PS3. Third-party peripheral makers are on the motion-sensing case and are designing Wii-style technology for the PS3 and Xbox. The company, In2Games, is a pioneer in motion-sensing technology and has improved on the Wii's motion sensing and developed hugely accurate tracking devices.

RATING 4/5

In2Games is indeed developing motion-sensing technology, but exactly how it can be used is beyond us. What we suspect will happen, much like the RealTrack system, is that a couple of rather shoddy games will be produced for the technology and it'll flop.

2 METAL GEAR SOLID ON XBOX. *Metal Gear Solid* is set to debut on Xbox 360 after a small, exclusive stint on the PS3. This is attributed to a source close to Kojima productions, who states that Kojima himself is coming under fire from all sides for not considering a multiformat *MGS*.

RATING 2/5

This is based on a single line on the cover of an as-yet unreleased magazine, and is more than likely a load of bull. The reason for a multiformat release would be to increase profits on the title, to cover ever-increasing development costs.

3 ZONE OF ENDERS IN PRODUCTION. Another Kojima-based rumour – this time it concerns the *Zone Of Enders*. A new one's currently in production at Kojima's studio and we should see it on shelves by the end of 2008.

RATING 3/5

We're sure another *ZOE* title will make its way onto the PS3 at some point, but we're not banking on another one in such a small frame of time.

4 SONY BLOCKING PS3 IMPORTS. After the forced closure of Lik-Sang, Sony is continuing its offensive on imports and will block any attempts to deliver PS3s to European consumers before its official release in March.

RATING 4/5

Sure, Sony has been making a big deal about imports, but no more than it has to. The company line is that Japanese and US PS3s lack the ability to get online and won't be able to play many of the European PSone and PS2 titles.

5 NO THIRD-PARTY PERIPHERALS FOR PS3. In an effort to dominate the PS3 peripheral market, Sony will block production of third-party peripherals, leaving companies like Joytech and Logic3 out in the cold.

RATING 0/5

Erm... rubbish. It would take some serious legal wrangling to get that one through, and if Sony did, the company would alienate many consumers by limiting peripheral innovation to licensed products.

Q&A

SIMON BENSON

We speak to the man behind MotorStorm about the future of off-road racers

INFORM
Name: SIMON BENSON
Company: EVOLUTION STUDIOS
Role: PRODUCER

Tell us three words that best describe your game.

■ Brutal, off-road, racing! Can off-road be counted as one word?

What makes it truly next gen?

■ Have you seen it? This game could only have been possible on the PS3 – not just any next-gen console. The persistent deforming terrain, the level of resolution in the worlds, the levels of detail and damage on seven different classes of vehicle – the list is endless.

What challenges did you face making a game for Sony's system?

■ One of our key problems was having no clear visibility of the benchmark of a PS3 game, because there are obviously none available yet. We turned this into a positive by looking elsewhere for our benchmark and chose movies and the real world instead – this was not an easy option, but it was clearly the right one, and the PS3 certainly didn't hold us back.

Can you give us one OMG moment from the game?

■ One OMG moment came when I paused the game to make a note and realised a brand new feature had been added – the ability to move the camera in and around the crash, to inspect over 10,000 different pieces of debris, the ragdoll physics on the bikers, the beautiful scenery. I was stunned – and I've seen a lot of this game! You guys are the first to be told about this feature.

What part of the game makes you smile/cry?

■ Smiling – interacting with the objects in the world, they're such fun in all vehicle classes and yet each one feels different. Cry – I'd have to say the AI on the more difficult stages. Pardon my French but the AI team have produced some ruthless, brutal bastards to race against.

Do you think players will have the patience to stick with Sony's Sixaxis controller?

■ It's purely a question of taste – pretty much in the same way that about 50 per cent of gamers still prefer D-pad to analogue stick. Some gamers – maybe those who often use steering wheels – will immediately love the Sixaxis control and this is especially true in the bonnet camera. In terms of benefit, it is unbelievably sensitive, which means that those who want the absolute maximum vehicle control will finally have it.

Consoles change but racing stays the same. How have you ensured that *MotorStorm* is different?

■ Innovating within an established genre is a big challenge – but not impossible. I think people will realise we've hit on something fresh and new with our combination of multiple dynamic routes, our off-road focus and the seven different classes of vehicle racing simultaneously. These things combined mean that this is a racing game that won't remind you too much of any other you've played.

What is your reaction to *Gran Turismo HD*'s system of microtransactions? Is this the future of racing titles ?

■ Online and micro payments have a massive future across all genres. I think there will be a 'learning curve' for a while before we find the model that developers, publishers and most importantly gamers are happy with. In many ways it reminds me of old arcade games – I think it really is the modern equivalent of putting another 10p in to see some more of the game.

How do you think the online revolution is changing the world of videogames?

■ For us, it's all about consoles. They've always been more accessible, cheaper, user-friendly and widespread compared to PC, and now that they are going online, they are carrying the same philosophy forward. So online console gaming is a distinct thing and it will attract new gamers and new experiences that will truly allow our wonderful medium to take on TV and movies in the popularity stakes.

How is your game going to change the world?

■ By making it flatter. It'll send thousands of mentalists into Monument Valley to rip it up and tear it down. Apologies in advance to the Navajo nation who own the land.

newsgrid

GOOD, BAD, EXPECTED, UNEXPECTED – LET'S PUT THE NEWS IN CONTEXT!

MAPPING OUT THE MONTH'S NEWS ON GRAPH PAPER. BECAUSE WE CAN

GOOD

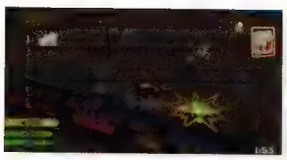
BAD

UNEXPECTED

EXPECTED

FREEBEES FOR FIRST 500K PS3S

Talladega Nights: The Ballad Of Ricky Bobby Blu-ray is to be included in with the first half million PS3s sold. While this isn't likely to wow the film-loving public, the mere fact that folk will have access to Blu-ray media straight out of the box is... well, brilliant.



EDI LOOKS SET FOR A BOOST

Phil Harrison recently clarified Sony's commitment to the Electronic Distribution Initiative. With titles like *Flow* and *Calling All Cars* already confirmed as Sony exclusives, we can't wait to see what the others are going to be like.

WE GOT OURSELVES A BRAND NEW SPANGLY PS3

Not only this, but we've been mucking around with some of the biggest launch titles like *Resistance*, *MotorStorm*, *Lair*, *Ridge Racer*, *Genji* and *Formula One*. What this means is that we'll have all the latest hands-on previews and import reviews ready for you next month.

LIK-SANG DOWNED BY SONY

The rather unhappy news that Lik-Sang has been successfully sued and put out of business is an immense happening. Not so much because of the loss of a single importer, but because of the precedent it sets. Goodbye importing.

SONY MISHIT ON PS3 TARGETS

The amount of PS3s available to buy at launch in Japan was supposed to be 100,000 units. Sadly this has been reduced by 20 per cent to, you guessed it, 80,000. Not great, Sony, must try harder.

Versus! Best Butlins Redcoat

RIKIMARU

Samurai and ex-Butlins Redcoat Rikimaru is one of the best hit men in the game. Given that the very existence of ninjas is pure nonsense, what future has this accomplished murderer in the modern world? What about Butlins? They take anyone.

Best in Red	3	4	**Best in Red**
Try getting Rikimaru out of his standard black attire. It ain't gonna happen. We can't imagine what he'd do if you tried to force a red polyester blazer on him			Similarly, we don't imagine it'd be an easy task to wrench Andre out of his thin white linen shirts, even if the oiled antipodean is way, way too fat for them now.
Drinking games	5	9	**Drinking games**
We're certain Rikimaru can take his drink, but we don't imagine the kind of meditative state you'd have to be in to play many ninja drinking games going down well in Bognor.			Hell, he's a f Australian, right? Bongo is a favourite down there. That's the one where you have to say 'Bongo' before downing your pint. Not that hard but very Butlins
Dancing	3	7	**Dancing**
Having spent his entire life in the shadows, we don't imagine Rikimaru would react well to the bright lights of a Butlins nightclub			Give the guy a bottle of baby oil and he's anyone's. He will have his shirt off and be well into a strip routine before you can say "Arrigh put it away."
CPR	9	5	**CPR**
Every Redcoat needs to know CPR don't they? Thankfully with a pocketful of ancient Japanese health potions, Rikimaru should breeze past the first aid exam			If it's a girl we've no doubt that Peter would be in there like a shot. We're not sure however whether he'd revive them or just make them feel ill when they woke up
Best pop cover	4	5	**Best pop cover**
Killing Me Softly always goes down well as a last dance at Butlins, but we suspect it may have a wholly different and sinister effect coming from Rikimaru's gruff vocebox.			As long as he tries anything but *Mysterious Girl*, Peter would fare wonderfully. Any attempt to revive any other of his dead tunes may result in heckling from the crowd
OVERALL	24	30	**OVERALL**

PETER ANDRE

Pop fiend Peter Andre is the middle name of Britain's most successful singer/songwriter/model/TV presenter/all round entertainment machine. Or is it? Peter is not the sharpest tool in the shed, but what we really want to know is does he have a secret stash of cocktail sticks and does he use them to pick the waxy remains of a wasted Wednesday out of his ears?

the next3 Gen

ALL THE LATEST NEW SHOTS AND INFORMATION ON THE GAMES THAT REALLY MATTER

LAIR

We've seen some things about *Lair* that make us a little less excited about Factor 5's fantasy dragon-based combat of late, namely some rather ropey animation and combat that, despite a distinctly epic feel, looks a little wishy-washy for a next-gen title. Recent hands-on play is beginning to sway us, however, so here's hoping our renewed hope is well founded.

- Astounding technology including Dynamic Range Lighting and progressive mesh that allows for heinous amounts of detail close up as well as at a distance
- More physics in your dragon than in the entire *Rogue Squadron* series
- Motion sensing with both flight and combat. Slam your pad down to initiate a dragon foot stamp, for example
- No online multiplayer
- 1080p at 60 frames per second

CALL OF DUTY 3

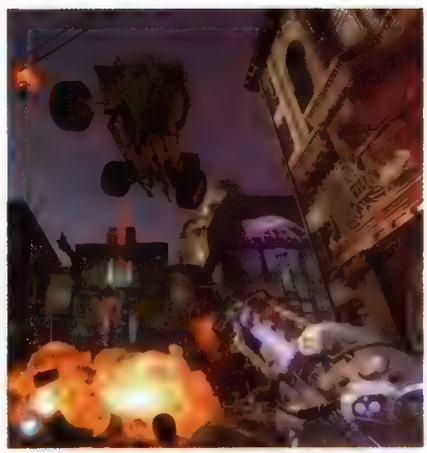
Much like *Lair*, some newly released footage for *Call Of Duty* has got us a little damp around the trouser area. It's not only the look of the piece however, it's the intense attention to detail that really strikes us. Enemies leave signs in the mud or grass, allowing you to track them; special wind physics affect the battle conditions and the unique level of player choice promised by Treyarch means this could well be one of the most proficient launch titles ever created.

- Sixaxis control for combat plus activities like rowing
- Hugely destructible environments
- 24-player multiplayer with massive array of vehicles
- Different soldier classes for online play, as well as a ranking system to build your clan around
- *No* loading screens. Really. Absolutely none
- Cut-scenes included this time around

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007

Unreal is gradually taking shape as a dominant force in the world of online console gaming, and not without reason. The ridiculous jumps this version is taking to leapfrog everything else coming up is impressing us a good deal more than most, even without the huge media push that other titles seem to enjoy.

- Modding to be included on PS3
- New vehicles like hoverboards, tanks and tripods like the Dark Walker – a tripod with a mega cannon
- Hoverboards allow you to triple your speed across the gigantic levels and latch onto other vehicles, but being shot from one leaves you vulnerable
- The weapons alone have more polygons than entire levels of *UT 2004*
- A vastly improved single-player mode where the outcome of one level affects the next



Helping you plan your gaming future

next3releases

Find out when all the big Playstation 3 games are coming to a store

March 2007

Bladestorm: The Hundred Years War	Koei
Blazing Angels: SOWWII	Ubisoft
Call Of Duty 3	Activision
Coded Arms Assault	Konami
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	Ubisoft
Enchanted Arms	Ubisoft
Everybody's Golf	Sony
Fatal Inertia	Koei
F.E.A.R.	Vivendi
Full Auto 2: Battlelines	Sega
Formula One Champ Edition	Sony
Half-Life 2: Episode Two	EA
Heavenly Sword	Sony
Hellboy	Konami
Genji: Days Of The Blade	Sony
Gran Turismo HD	Sony
Madden NFL 07	EA
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	Activision
Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire	Namco Bandai
MotorStorm	Sony
NBA Live 07	EA
Need For Speed Carbon	EA
Ninja Gaiden: Sigma	Tecmo
Rainbow Six Vegas	Ubisoft
Ridge Racer 7	Namco Bandai
Resistance: Fall Of Man	Sony
Sega Golf Club	Sega
Sega Rally	Sega
SingStar	Sony
Sonic The Hedgehog	Sega
Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft
Stranglehold	Midway
The Darkness	2K Games
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	EA
Tony Hawk's Project 8	Activision
Unreal Tournament 2007	Midway
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom	Ubisoft
Virtua Fighter 5	Sega
Virtua Tennis 3	Sega
Warhawk	Sony

April 2007

Alone In The Dark	Atari
Armored Core 4	Sega
Colin McRae: DIRT	Codemasters
Elveon	10tacle Studios

May 2007

Avalon	Climax
Mercenaries 2: World In Flames	Pandemic
Tom Clancy's GRAW 2	Ubisoft

June 2007

Afrika	Sony
Battlefield: Bad Company	EA
Def Jam: Icon	EA
Devil May Cry 4	Capcom
Fifth Phantom Saga	Sega
Lair	Sony
Medal Of Honor: Airborne	EA

2 sense

Summing up games to the power of two

Fight Night Round 3
Throwing fists

Genji 2
Button bash

Afrika
Really wild

Call Of Duty 3
Killing fields

Ridge Racer 7
Slide away

Army Of Two
Two good

Elveon
Elf service

Tekken 6
Happy slap

Dirty Harry
Dirty deeds

Armored Core 4
Robot wars

Ni-Oh	Koei
Romance Of The Three Kingdoms	Koei
Spider-Man 3	Activision
The Eye Of Judgement	Sony
The Wheelman	Midway

July 2007

Army Of Two	EA
Frontlines: Fuel Of War	THQ
Monster Madness	SouthPeak
Monster Kingdom: Unknown Realms	Sony
SKATE	EA
The Outsider	Frontier
TNA Wrestling	Midway
Untitled	Naughty Dog

August 2007

Golden Axe	Sega
HAZE	Ubisoft
House Of The Dead 4	Sega
NBA Street	EA
Parabellum	Acony
Stuntman 2	THQ
WarDevil: Enigma	Digi-Guys

September 2007

Clive Barker's Jericho	Codemasters
Burnout 5	EA
Dirty Harry	The Collective
Indiana Jones 2007	LucasArts
Metro 2033: The Last Refuge	4A-Games

NB All release dates correct at time of going to press. Release dates subject to change without notice.

Wanted on PS3

Here's one we'd like to see on our side of the fence sooner rather than later

Huxley (PC)

Forget MMORPGs as the era of the MMOFPS is about to arrive in the form of *Huxley*. Like other FPS games of this genre, *Huxley* will utilise Epic's *Unreal 3* engine; however, unlike others, developer Webzen hopes over 50,000 players will be able to join the same post-apocalyptic-themed game world.

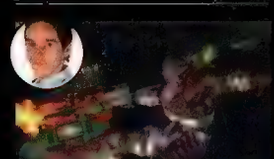
next3team

WHO'S WAITING FOR WHAT...

EDITOR IN CHIEF
NICK JONES

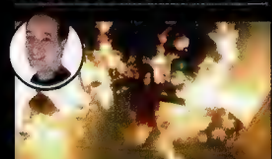
MOST WANTED
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GRAN TURISMO HD
DEVIL MAY CRY 4
RESIDENT EVIL 5
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE TWO

ART EDITOR
JAMES DAVIES



MOST WANTED
UNREAL 2007
ASSASSIN'S CREED
GTA IV
TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8
HAZE

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
KEITH HENNESSEY



MOST WANTED
VIRTUA TENNIS 3
HEAVENLY SWORD
LAIR
F.E.A.R.
RIDGE RACER 7

Key game Liable to slip Could be dodgy

es

near you

Project Offset	Offset Software
Resident Evil 5	Capcom
The Club	Sega
The Wall	Play Ten
Tekken 6	Namco Bandai

October 2007

Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare	Activision
FIFA	EA
Getaway	Sony
Grand Theft Auto IV	Rockstar
Fall Of Liberty	Codemasters
Monster Hunter 3	Capcom
Pro Evolution Soccer 7	Konami

November 2007

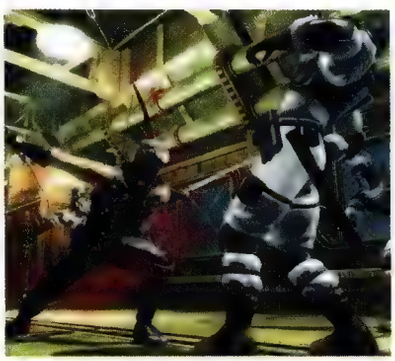
After Burner	Sega
Assassin's Creed	Ubisoft
Brothers In Arms Hell's Highway	Ubisoft
Dynasty Warriors	Koei
Eight Days	Sony
Interstellar Marines	Zero Point Software
Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots	Konami
WWE SmackDown vs. RAW	THQ

December 2007

Eyedentify	Sony
Killing Day	Ubisoft
Killzone	Sony
Turok	Buena Vista Games

TBC 2008

Data-Fly	ORiGO
Dark Sector	D3 Publisher
Dreamers	Dreamgazers
Far Cry 2	Ubisoft
Final Fantasy XIII	Square Enix
Final Fantasy Versus XIII	Square Enix
Forbidden Siren 3	Sony
Harker	The Collective
Heavy Rain	Quantic Dream
Kuriyama	Grasshopper
LA Noire	Rockstar
Makai Wars	Nippon Ichi
Prince Of Persia 4	Ubisoft
Rain	Artoon
Ratchet & Clank	Sony
Rogue Warrior	Bethesda
Shin Megami Tensei 4	Atlus
Lord Of The Rings: The White Council	EA
White Knight Story	



next3 Essentials

Plan ahead for PS3's essential...

Action Adventures

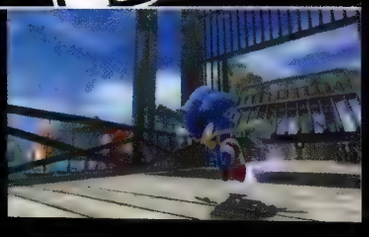
1 Devil May Cry 4
Nero versus Dante in a combo-fest of truly epic proportions

2 Heavenly Sword
So beautiful it's deadly, that goes for the game as well as the girl

3 Assassin's Creed
The ultimate in next-gen adventure, we're keeping an eagle eye on this

4 GTA IV
We don't know a lot about it, we only know that it will be awesome

5 Sonic The Hedgehog
Reinvented and hopefully revived, the blue blaze looks to set the PS3 alight



YOUR TOP TEN

Join our forum and vote for your most-wanted PS3 games www.next3.co.uk/forum

METAL GEAR SOLID 4
ASSASSIN'S CREED
DEVIL MAY CRY 4
GTA IV
RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
HEAVENLY SWORD
FINAL FANTASY XIII
TEKKEN 6
RESIDENT EVIL 5
GRAN TURISMO HD

STAFF WRITER
TOM LECLERC

MOST WANTED
ASSASSIN'S CREED
RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
ARMY OF TWO
HEAVENLY SWORD
GRAN TURISMO HD

STAFF WRITER
CRAIG GILMORE

MOST WANTED
F.E.A.R.
STRANGLEHOLD
ASSASSIN'S CREED
THE DARKNESS
RESIDENT EVIL 5

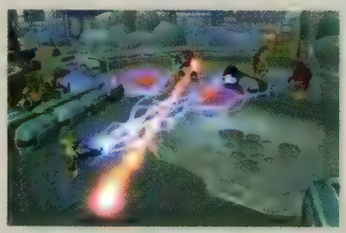
SUB EDITOR
SARAH SLEE

MOST WANTED
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
HELLBOY
TIGER WOODS
LEGO BATMAN
BURNOUT 5

newsflashes

RATCHET & CRANK ON PS3 IS CONFIRMED

With Sony's shooter *Resistance: Fall Of Man* put to bed, Insomniac Games has officially announced that it's now concentrating on its next project, *Ratchet & Clank* for the PS3. Though the game's existence will come as no surprise to fans who got a quick peek of it at E3, it's now 100 per cent official with the Insomniac newsletter confirming "we are in full production on our *R&C* Playstation 3 game and you'll be hearing more from us in the not-so-distant future." Very informative.



PSP GOES COLOUR CRAZY

With the disappointing announcement that on launch day the only colour the PS3 will be available in is black, Sony fans will at least have the chance to accessorise it with a PSP in one of three very funky new shades. Rumoured to accompany the recently announced Pink PSP is a silver and metallic blue model. So if you're planning to get the silver PS3 when it's eventually released, you might want to think ahead and buy the silver PSP to ensure you avoid any embarrassing console colours clashes.

CLOVER TO CLOSE

Respected Japanese publisher Capcom has decided to close Clover Studio in March 2007 in an effort to 'increase efficiency'. Working on such creative titles as *Viewtiful Joe*, *Okami* and *God Hand*, the decision is puzzling but is believed to be linked to financial losses. It's in tandem with reports that the positions of some of Capcom's top talent, such as *Devil May Cry* director Hideki Kamiya and *Viewtiful Joe* producer Atsushi Inaba are also in doubt. The publisher maintains that both Kamiya and Inaba still work there 'on a contractual basis' and that the release of *Okami* and *God Hand* will go ahead as planned.

SONY FUND ORIGINAL CONTENT FOR E-DISTRIBUTION

40 downloadable games in the works

THOSE pondering their first PS3 downloads will be spoilt for choice, according to Sony's Phil Harrison who says the company is working with developers on around 40 exclusive games for its e-Distribution Initiative. EDI is Sony's answer to Microsoft's Live Arcade and Nintendo's Virtual Console and it will offer a huge selection of downloadables including PSone and PS2 games, alongside original IP.

As part of an interview being serialised on the 'semi-official' Sony blog Three Speech, Harrison said that EDI is "a call to action to the development community to encourage them to create games specifically for us, that we would fund, that we would publish, in the online sense of the word and distribute online." Sony Europe's executive vice president then went on to confirm "we're developing about 40 products that fit the strategy right now." Games already announced and generating interest are *flOw* and David Jaffe's *Calling All Cars*, so expect many more downloadable delights to be announced on the lead up to launch.

Nouveau retro

We're delighted to hear that Sony is opting for original content rather than simply aping other consoles with retro 2D offerings, this means that smaller developers that can't compete on the scale of the EA's and the Ubisoft's of the games world can still exist on the PS3. Making smaller downloadable games helps keep costs low, but who's to say they can't be as innovative and addictive as their big-budget counterparts?

AFTERTHOUGHT

EBAY.CO.UK SAY NO WAY TO PS3

Online auction site clamps down on PS3 imports

THOSE hoping to make a quick buck on the sale of PS3s online might have to rethink their plans as the UK division of eBay has banned listings of Japanese and US PS3s on its pages stating that only consoles bought within Europe can be resold there. Obviously it's a reaction to Sony's promise to clamp down on 'grey importing'. After four days of Japanese PS3s being traded freely online, the auction site posted a statement informing sellers they are "not permitted to list Playstation 3 consoles and games on eBay.co.uk until the authorised European pre-sales period begins in February."

The stipulations continued as a set of rules have also been put in place to protect potential buyers, including only offering one PS3 per account, which must be accompanied by a photo of the console itself or a pre-order receipt. Sellers must be able to prove that the PS3 was bought in Europe and PayPal will be the only payment method offered. When asked why the new measures have been bought into effect, an eBay spokesman said it was to "protect the whole eBay community" and "to ensure that eBay remains a safe and reputable place to buy and sell." Those considering flouting the rules are warned that action may be taken against accounts if the listing doesn't comply with the guidelines.

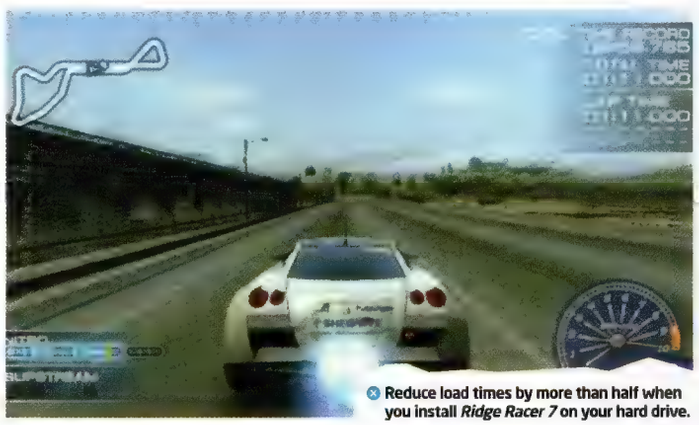
Before you begin wielding your sword, check out the 'Install' option for *Genji* on the start-up menu.

PS3 HARD DRIVE USED TO REDUCE LOAD TIMES

Does faster loading mean less hard drive space?

GAMERS are difficult folks to please; we don't want long loading times, but are often unwilling to give up any of our precious hard drive space to cut them down, and why should we? That's valuable 'jazz' space we could be giving up. So to help solve the quandary, it seems Sony is giving us the choice; when doing some massive damage on *Genji* an 'install' option was spotted on the start-up menu screen. The Sony rep explained that it gives you the option to install the game, committing 4GB of data from the game's Blu-ray disc to the PS3 hard drive. The three-minute one-off procedure is said to cut in-game load times from around 15 seconds to just four.

While this is encouraging news and allows giga-hogs to hold onto hard drive space, we just hope every game gives us the choice rather than simply dumping data streamed from the disc onto our hard drive. *Ridge Racer 7* for instance gives you the option to deposit 5 GB of info onto the PS3, but if you have the low end 20GB unit we can see memory being filled up very quickly. The obvious way to combat the situation would be to upgrade your Playstation 3 with a bigger HDD, which you can easily do by just sliding in any 2.5" Laptop hard drive.



Reduce load times by more than half when you install *Ridge Racer 7* on your hard drive.

THREE SPEECH OR SONY SPEECH

Is this Sony's answer to Major Nelson?

THERE'S no denying that when creating its new online service, Sony has been heavily influenced by Microsoft's Live: Friend's list, GamerTags, e-Distribution and so on; but is the big S also looking to put its own spin on Major Nelson's blog? For those not familiar with Live, Major Nelson is the GamerTag of Larry Hryb, Xbox Live director of programming, who uses his blog to communicate information and news about all things Xbox. For many of Microsoft's online gamers, Nelson's page is visited more than that hotty lesbian mud-wrestling footage we all love so much, no? Just us then. The point, is it's a one-stop shop for Live gaming and this month a new site called threespeech.com went live claiming to be the 'semi-official' voice of Sony.

The exact wording on Threespeech.com's home page reads "Three Speech isn't a part of PlayStation, but it does get to speak to PlayStation. You could say we're semi-official." Featuring interviews with various Sony execs, it does seem like a genuine attempt to get its message to the masses in a more involving way than just official websites. Nevertheless, is the semi-official approach really enough? If Sony hopes to use this site to build a community (done so well by Major Nelson and, to some extent, Nintendo's Reggie) we need a figure to relate to, someone from Sony who is out there playing games and taking names and until someone with sufficient skills and personality steps forward, we're not sure it will have the same sort of impact as Nelson. But who from Sony fits the bill – Harrison, Hirai, Kutaragi? Hmmm, perhaps not, but with a little more consideration we're sure someone from inside Sony HQ can be found. Blog Idol, anyone?

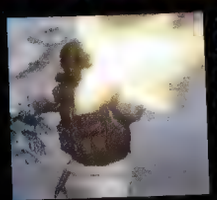
Pushing the plunger with the weight of opinion

Is history about to repeat itself?

WHAT'S GOING ON (LINE)?

SONY ONLINE SUCCESS

With the popularity of Xbox Live, it's easy to forget that NetPlay showed us flashes of what Sony is capable of

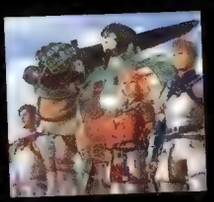


SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS

SOCOM was one of the earliest titles to make use of the PS2's online adapter and quickly became the most popular thing on the net since Paris Hilton got hold of a night-vision camera. Online play features three game modes: Suppression, Extraction and Demolition and the service comes at no additional charge. It was also the first PS2 game to offer voice chat via headset.

FINAL FANTASY XI

It will come as no surprise to learn that this game proved massively popular on PS2 - in places where it was available, that is. In January 2004, Square Enix announced that a total of over 500,000 users utilising over 1 million characters in the game. While PC Poindexters contributed a fair chunk of that figure, PS2 gamers still made up the numbers.



MADDEN NFL

Another factor of Sony's early online success was third-party support. At the time of the online launch, some EA Sports titles were exclusively available online for PS2. With Madden NFL 2004's release, EA saw sales of over 3 million units leading it to claim the largest third-party online community. It was a place where jocks and nerds could live in perfect harmony.

WITH Playstation 3 debug kits now rolling out of Sony central and into the offices of publishing house nationwide, many questions have now been answered. We know how the games run, where all the cables connect and just what lies beneath that intriguing front flap. However, a pivotal piece of the puzzle is yet to be slotted into place and a key question to be answered: can a company whose online strategy in the last generation was so weak really turn things around and deliver a service that will rival the super-slick Xbox Live?

While the PlayStation 2 didn't provide network service as part of its core package and couldn't really be considered a rip-roaring success due to its sizeable advantage in terms of user base, it did boast more users than Xbox Live in the last generation of hardware. Though last-gen number crunching makes very little difference today, what with the Xbox Live now attracting more beard stroking shut-ins than a *Star Trek* Blog, it does at least prove there are a multitude of PlayStation players out there chomping at the bit to get online. So with Sony's president of worldwide studios, Phil Harrison adamant that all the components of its highly anticipated online service are in place and fully functional, what will be waiting for them when they do?

The answer is painfully predictable – nobody really knows. Over the past few years, Sony has been busy developing an operating system and service that it hopes will silence its staunchest critics, but just days before it's Japanese and US launch it doesn't even have a name yet. When SCEA boss, Kaz Hirai was asked in a recent interview to divulge some information on Sony's online plans he simply said, "It's designed from the ground up to be a network console, what we don't do, however, is have a brand name for the network service, this is because with don't see a 'PlayStation offline'. It doesn't matter if you're enjoying content from a Blu-ray disc or you are enjoying content you just downloaded from the network, at the end of the day it's all Playstation 3." First class patter indeed, but it still doesn't explain what gameplay features it will offer. Further probing led Hirai to discuss some of the online attributes for its first-party shooter, *Resistance: Fall Of Man*. " It will support 40 players online as well as video chat, text chat, voice chat and downloading additional content for games." It's reassuring to know

we've been hearing some disturbing rumours about just how 'open' Sony is being with third parties. First came the announcement that the online component had been dropped from the Activision's PS3 version of *Tony Hawk's Project 8*, apparently due to the fact developer Neversoft didn't receive sufficient information on how the online service works. A disappointing revelation indeed, but heads of the PlayStation populous dropped even lower on hearing the news that Sega's *Virtua Tennis 3* would also be shipping without online play.

Seeing as though versus showdowns are a fundamental element of the game this obviously comes as worrying news, but not as worrying as the explanation reportedly given by game producer, Mie Kumagai as to why there is no online *Virtua Tennis*. According to a Finnish website, Kumagai said that Sony did not deliver the necessary information about its network, making coding the online mode impossible. This is the same reason given by Neversoft, so what exactly is going on? Why just a few months before launch did two of the PS3's key developers not have full online specs? Surely in a next-gen war where online play is so essential, omitting online features is handing the advantage to Xbox 360 who will deliver the game with Live play as standard.

In an effort to unearth the truth, we sought official word from Sega who would only say that: "*Virtua Tennis 3* Playstation 3 does not have an online mode confirmed at this time." While avoiding addressing the reasons why it's 'unconfirmed', it does suggest that online play will be implemented at a later stage. When we went rapping on Sony's giant door to get its side of the story it was unwilling to comment on the state of other publishers' titles, but did assure us that its own in-house titles will definitely feature online play. With Sony's titles on track we hope it's helping third-party developers to implement online components before the launch of the console to ensure Sony's service is strong enough to complete with an already thriving Xbox Live.

that these specs have come straight from Sony top brass as they seem to quash rumours that surfaced earlier in the month suggesting you would have to exit your game in order to chat with friends.

So all is well with first-party titles online, but what about future for third-party publishers? In his TGS keynote speech, Ken Kutaragi waxed lyrical about how Sony's open network will encourage developer interaction; however, over the past few days and weeks

PS2 VS PS3

Spot the difference

The differences between the patchy PS2 service and the stellar new Playstation 3 online network are set to be astronomical. Unlike the PS2, Sony's new console is designed to go online on day one out of the box. It has been built to be a network console and so online functionality influences almost every aspect of the system - from gameplay to downloadable content...

Operating system Instead of having to having to boot up a piece of software to do anything related to online functionality; like the PS2, the PS3 has a fully upgradeable operating system that is capable of downloading patches and updates over the network and applying them to itself, a little like the PSP's system.

Hard Drive A major difference is that both SKUs now include a hard drive, critical for downloading content and game saves. No more memory cards.

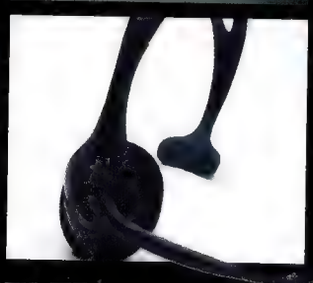
Multiple Profiles You can store several User Profiles on the same machine. Select a profile and the system logs in as that person, setting configuration details according to the data stored for that profile. This way you can keep all you game saves, gamer points and sly porn downloads safe from prying eyes.

Browser The PS3 has a fully functioning web browser that will allow access to any internet website.

Wireless The PS3 offers a wireless network, so no more playing around with cables, ports and network adaptors.

Accounts There are now two types of accounts: the master accounts are like administrator accounts, while 'associated accounts' can be restricted.

Sign-in IDs The PS3 features global sign-in IDs, which makes the process of finding and adding friends to your list very simple. Like Xbox Live it will also track the online status of your friends for that true 'Big Brother' experience.



Headset Like the PS2 the PS3 will feature full voice chat during games and if rumours are true you'll still be able to use your old PS2 USB headset - tightwads rejoice. We think we'll wait for the Bluetooth version.

TwitchGaming

Thoughts, imaginings and opinion from Next3s resident columnist, Twitch

The Wait Isn't Over

But I love it anyway

TWO BARE feet slip into a pair of Converse sneakers. A young boy looks to the alarm clock beside his bed as it inexplicably changes from 11:17 to 3:00. A smile slowly etches over his face. As he looks outside his bedroom window the letter 'three' reflects in his right eye. He grabs a rucksack and exits the room, walking past his mother as he leaves the apartment. Climbing the building's fire escape, the young boy finds a dull grey sky hanging overhead... and another person waiting on the adjacent building – a knowing smile between them. Cut to our big reveal: a giant 'three' hangs in the sky above, casting its majestic shadow on even more people now waiting below. The Wait Is Over.

In case you can't tell, I've been watching that first US Playstation 3 advert an awful lot lately. That's not in some strange attempt to prolong my anticipation of the PS3, either. It's because I think it's one of the best commercials the giant has created. Sure, it doesn't sound like much in print but it really is a triumph for Sony. Some people have debated its worth, but what do you expect? The advert reveals absolutely nothing about the console and there isn't even any videogame footage. It's about the farthest thing from a console commercial you would imagine. That is, if you have no experience with Sony.

This is a company that knows how to get consumers talking by instigating debate. Something its competitors seem to struggle with. Sony has always been a good arbiter of quality when it comes to creating advertisements – as evidenced by the vast lexicon accrued since the release of the PSone. It started with 'SAPS' (Society Against PlayStation) and 'Mental Wealth' (the Chris Cunningham video of the alien girl with pigtails), reached PS2 with 'I Am The Wolfman', David Lynch's 'The Third Place' and arguably peaked with 'Double Life' – one of the greatest ads to ever grace this country's screens.

Microsoft has only challenged Sony's artistic integrity twice and both times saw its adverts banned. What's upsetting about this is that in moments of desperation to produce something on the same level as Sony, Microsoft inadvertently created its two best television ads. The first was the notorious womb-to-grave commercial. It saw a baby spat straight out of its mother, fly through the air while rapidly aging, then come to a stop six feet under. Shocking and controversial: but exactly the sort of thing Microsoft could capitalise on. The second was much more fun: a shoot-out in a train station involving hundreds of people pointing their fingers at each other and shouting "Bang". It was stupid and clearly over the top. But it was also brilliant because of it.

Nintendo on the other hand hasn't really needed to emulate this sort of advertising. Nintendo covers its own niche market and therefore only appeals to a crowd it already has by the neck. Although, to be fair, some of Nintendo's stuff has been excellent; in particular, one piece that saw Japanese school kids bursting out of class and racing the streets of Japan with insane acrobatic stunts in an effort to reach the one store that was stocking the Nintendo DS – then, as one final visual, everyone turning into Mario as they arrived.

But this is an area Sony has and forever will dominate. It doesn't just relate to consoles either – remember that gorgeous Sony Bravia advert with the colourful balls bouncing down the hill? Taken out of context it means little. But consider how striking the visual is. It also clearly relates to the product that Sony is pitching to consumers. It could have bored you with trivial product information but there's nothing trivial about Sony.

The same applies to that first PS3 advert. At a glance it means very little. To some people it won't make any sense until you get to the big reveal at the end. It's the sort of thing that might piss off viewers because there's nothing straightforward about it. But when you analyse specific camera angles and shot compositions it makes sense (the number 'three' even emerges several times). We're treated to shots of the young boy preparing for a journey and leaving his family behind with nary a glance. Which is, hypothetically speaking, exactly what all gamers will do when they purchase a PS3 and pour hours into it.

It's beautiful and affecting stuff. More importantly, it's apt and I can't wait to see what Sony unleashes with its UK commercials. This is Sony at its most cerebral and brilliant and it's hard for me not to fall in love with the commercial. That, and I am a giant Brian Eno fan.

Twitch

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Playstation 3

The Verdict

We got one! Finally! Next3 is proud to present the world's first Playstation3 playtest as we dissect the hardware and the latest games with up-to-the-minute code. In this humongous 39-page feature we'll be exploring every aspect of the Playstation 3's functionality and bring you the hands-on verdict on all the latest PS3 games. You won't find a more detailed analysis of Sony's new console anywhere. Enjoy...

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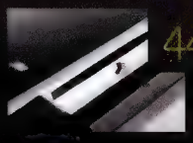

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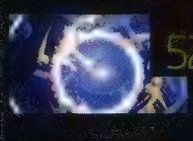

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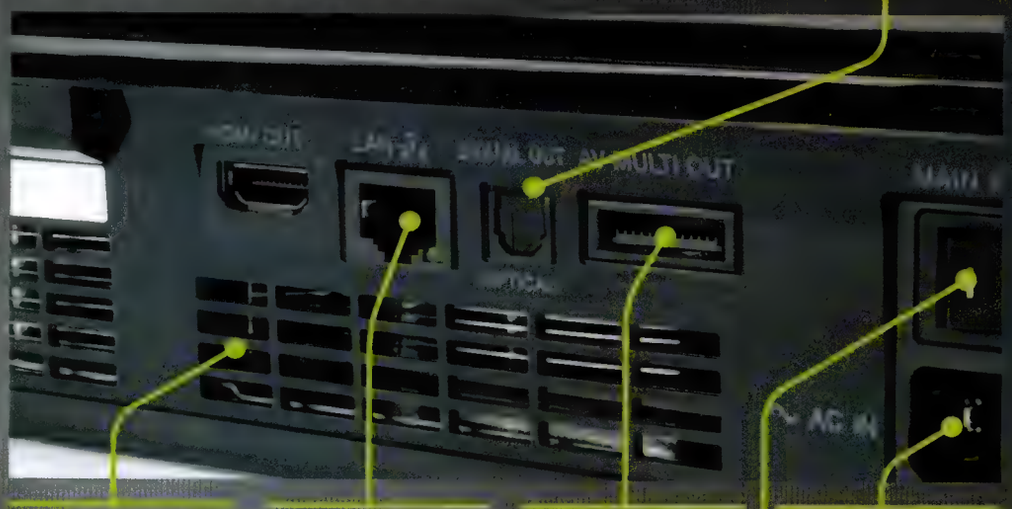
REAR

The Holy Grail of ports and the thing that distinguishes the PS3 from every other next-gen consoles on the market. Think it makes no difference? Think again.

After searching the PS3 parcel to our horror we noticed it had only come packaged with an AV composite cable (yes, the one that came with the PSone). So within minutes we were out the door doing our fastest 'dad run' down to Dixons to pick up a HDMI cable and we can testify that there's a huge difference in picture quality. As there should be.



DIGITAL OUT » Get your surround system plugged in so you can rock out.

VENTS » [illegible] keep Sony's power-hungry machine from [illegible] Even on standby the PS3 has more than its fair share of ports. Dotted around the back, side and bottom of the machine's slim chassis are [illegible]

ETHERNET » [illegible] to ride the information superhighway [illegible] out browsing, downloading and uploading [illegible] but connect to the internet [illegible] Ethernet [illegible]

AV OUT » For all your old school component and composite audio and video connections. Folks without HD-ready televisions will have to use this until they level up. The good news is that all your PS2 cables are compatible.

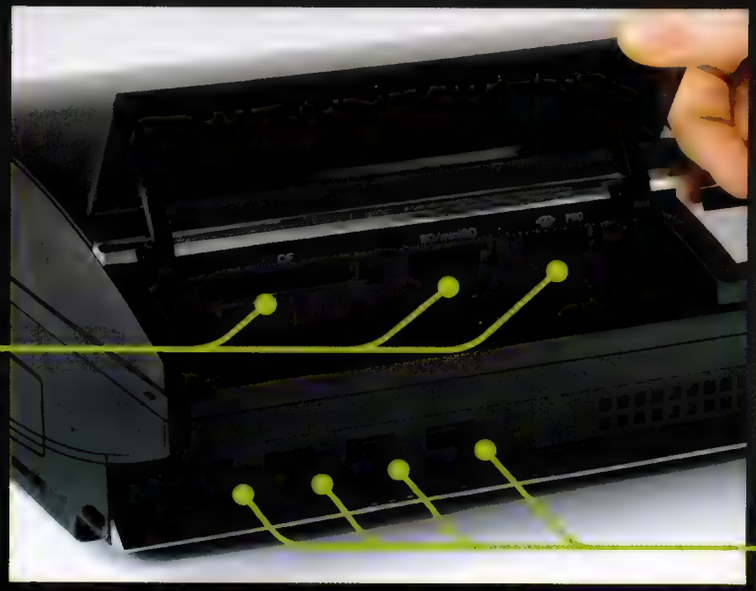
POWER SOCKET » The power supply has gone three-pin like a PC, that's a whole extra pin of power.

ON/OFF SWITCH » PS2-like bulky power on/off switch – looks a bit ugly, but is essential for all those energy [illegible] it's out there.

THE PS3 UNWRAPPED

NEXT 3'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE PLAYSTATION 3

CARD PORTS » Lurking under the flap is three memory ports for MemoryStick PRO, SD memory card and CompactFlash cards. This of course means that all of the information squirrelled away on your storage devices such as MP3s, movies and photos can be conveniently viewed on your PS3. Be advised though, you can't plug your PSP MemoryStick Duo into the port and start up/downloading, as you need an adaptor to make it work. Chances are you are already in possession of said adaptor, as they often come free with memory cards, but if not they cost just pennies to purchase. These ports seem designed primarily for transferring information from cameras, camcorders and mobiles rather than the PSP as that can transfer information via Wi-Fi connection.



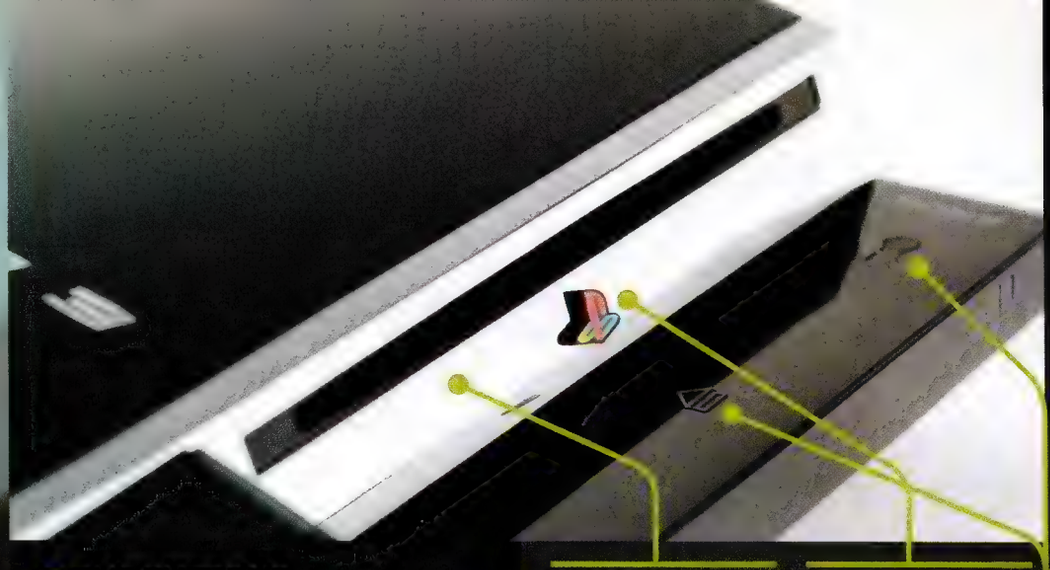
THE MEDIA BAY

A plastic flap designed to keep the open-mouthed memory ports hidden. We like the way the flap snaps shut but the plastic is decidedly fragile and feels like it might easily be cracked, snapped or pulled off. It's certainly not built to withstand excessive pawing, but then again it probably won't get it.

USB PORTS » Snuggled neatly underneath the PS3's protruding disc balcony lies the four USB 2.0 ports where memory storage devices can be connected; but, more importantly, controllers can be charged via USB connectors. Although we're not entirely sure what we'll use all these USB ports for, we're happy to have them.

Plugging in a USB keyboard works well, but constant migration between Sixaxis and keyboard is a bit of a kerfuffle. Hard drive and Wi-Fi activity is shown on these handy indicators.

POWER SUPPLY » The power supply is built into the machine, so no ugly brick to trip over.



THE BUTTONS

If the sheer size and shininess of the PS3 doesn't get your mates cooing with delight then the face button will. If you ever doubted that the future was now, just run your fingers over the touch-sensitive buttons. Want to eject a disc or start your machine, but are too lazy to exert any valuable finger energy? Then lightly depress the eject or on/off button and it's job done. We predict some big smiles but dangerously obese sausage fingers in the months to come.

CASING

Straight out of the box you can't fail to be impressed by just how shiny/smooth the PS3 is. Seriously, this thing is shiner than a greased seal and it's curvy convex just cries out to be touched. Therein lies the first problem, beautiful the black clear plastic maybe but it suffers the same fate as the PSP, in that it shows up every single finger print smudge and (god forbid) slight scratch. We feel as though Sony needs to include a pair of white snooker-ball handling gloves just to lift the PS3 out of the box. Needless to say those with sweaty, pasty hands should be kept well clear.

DISC SLOT

The very definition of minimalism, the PS3 dispenses with the cumbersome face wart that is the disc tray and features a slot that sucks in the disc when a Blu-ray, CD, DVD, PSone or PS2 game is fed into it. A small thing, but one that out-next-gen's the 360 and looks super sexy.

HARD DRIVE

Like the Xbox 360, the PS3 has a removable hard drive, designed seamlessly into the console unit. Smaller than its 360 counterpart, the hard drive is located on the side of the machine and is camouflaged well. In fact, if you didn't know it was there you could easily miss it. It certainly wouldn't spoil the line of a tight-fitting suit.

Worried about running out of space to store your downloaded movies, games and pictures? Don't be because the PS3 is compatible with any PC laptop 2.5" HDD – simply slide the standard hard drive out and replace with a new beefier version. For instance, you could upgrade your 20 or 60Gb PS3 HDD for a 120Gb one for around £100.

SILVER STRIP >> Refusing to go the way of the faceplate the (60 GB) PS3 has a silver strip running along the front of the machine and raised *Spider-Man* font on top that add a nice piece of flair to the package and are a tad more smudge resistant than the black. The silver strip also helps distinguish the slot from the flap – we'll stop now before we roam any further into *Carry On* double entendre territory.

PLAYSTATION LOGO >> Just like PS2, the little PlayStation logo can be turned both horizontally and vertically to better suit the position of your PS3. How clever.

If the PS3 is sleeping just wave a disc under its nose to wake it up. Sliding in a disc or pressing the PS button on the Sixaxis brings the console out of its dormant standby state and turns it on ready for action.

WEIGHT >> A tad weightier than the Xbox 360 (approx 5kg) the PS3 feels like a solid machine and not like it's going to break if treated too roughly, although when you first get it we're sure you'll be handling it like a newborn child.

BUTTON DISPLAY >> Touch the button and the indicator lights are activated: red for off, green for on and blue and green when a disc is loading up. Like the PS2 the blue/green combo looks very stylish, but our one quibble is that the clear black plastic casing causes the light to defuse on the display, so it's not a solid solitary line. Yes, we're very picky.

NOISE >> Those used to the thunderous hum of the Xbox 360 will be pleasantly surprised by just how quiet the PS3 is – you'll barely even know it's switched on.

HEAT >> With all that power churning under the bonnet the PS3 does get warm, so if you're playing for a few hours you might want to turn your radiators down.

BLU RAY

Every game we've received so far has been shipped on 25GB single layer Blu-ray disc, so does this support Sony's claim that PS3 games are just too big for DVD or is it simply a marketing stunt to fool us presumptuous journos?

SIXAXIS CONTROLLER 'HANDS-ON'

NO DOUBT YOU'VE HEARD BY NOW THAT THE LACK OF RUMBLE IN THE SIXAXIS MAKES IT FEEL MORE LIKE TOMY THAN SONY. BUT WHAT HAS THE PLAYSTATION 3 CONTROLLER GOT TO OFFER?

USB PORT >> This is used for charging the Sixaxis pad. When the cable is connected, the pad functions as normal and the connection feels fairly secure, standing up to rigorous shaking and tilting during play.

LED >> Indicates what player you are during multiplayer games.

L2 & R2 >> Now triggers instead of just shoulder buttons, this is a major design change from the DualShock and while they work well for shooters, they still don't feel as comfortable as the 360's.

RUMBLE >> During play, the lack of force feedback feels like a tragic loss and we're not sure the substitution of tilt will ever truly compensate.

SIXAXIS

Ergonomics

It's simple really - if you're used to the DualShock you're going to like the feel of the Sixaxis. No new curves or drastic redesign, it rests comfortably in the hand with every button in easy reach. The Sixaxis' big drawback is of course the weight but, while it feels light, thankfully it doesn't feel cheap.

Buttons

The analogue sticks still feel wobbly and ill-positioned for some game genres, but the triggers are a revelation. The D-pad still takes pride of place and the pressure-sensitive buttons are extremely responsive. Could've made a bigger deal of the PS button, though.

Gimmick: Tilt functionality

While it adds an extra element of interactivity to games, the loss of rumble seems like a raw deal and a step backwards. We hope developers can see the potential and save tilt from being dismissed as a novelty.

Wireless

The Sixaxis has a range of over 20 metres but how far are you really going to sit away from your TV? Rechargeable controller and USB charger come as standard - you get about 30 hours play on a single charge.

XBOX 360 CONTROLLER

Ergonomics

It's had rave reviews and with good reason; the Xbox 360 pad is one comfortable piece of kit. Like so many of our romantic conquests it's plump, curvy and lets you get a firm grip straight away.

Buttons

Here the analogue stick is king, making the D-pad virtually redundant. The face buttons are a bit spongy, however, the triggers are effective. Still not convinced by those bumpers, though.

Gimmick: Force feedback

No tilt technology but lovely, lovely rumble and we'll take that in a heartbeat. The feedback adds so much to the gaming experience and Microsoft has made a wise move by paying off immersion and offering feedback. But the next-gen war won't be won or lost because of rumble, will it?

Wireless

Works well during play but there are several disadvantages. First you have to buy a charge lead and battery-pack if you want to avoid shelling out for several hundred AAs. And when you do buy the extras, it only holds about 10 hours of charge.

BATTERY » When charging the pad the PS button glows red. The batter holds thirty hours of charge. A slight problem is that unlike the 360 pad, the battery packs can't be replaced, so if they break they'll have to be sent back to Sony for repair.

CROSS » The cross has aped the console and is made from a see-through plastic, not really sure why, though.

PS BUTTON » Pressing this turns the controller on and the LCDs flash as it searches for a PS3 to connect to, but if nothing is found it will automatically turn itself off. Pressing the button is an easy way to turn the console on and switch it off.

D-PAD » It seems there's an extra layer of grip on the D-pad, but that might be because our PS2 pads are so well thumbed there are now smoother than Phil Harrison's head.

ANALOGUE STICKS » Longer than the DualShock's but still in the same place on the pad. While they're now much more manoeuvrable, the sticks still don't feel as precise as the Xbox 360's.

TILT TESTED

How does the motion sensing technology work in practice?

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

This is more what we imagined from the motion-sensing pad. Its use is not integral to the control system, but just enough to keep you sharp. The one way we've used the pad so far is in combat, when an alien face-hugger launched itself at us and attached to our face (funnily enough). A message then flashes on screen to shake the ugly mother off. It might not be a very imaginative way to use the technology but it is a very effective way to bring you into the game.

MOTORSTORM

You might imagine this would be the perfect vehicle to show off what the Sixaxis can do, but it's infuriately hard to get used to. In the in-game option menu the tilt sensitivity can be set between one and ten, but even on the first setting it isn't exactly forgiving.

Being a fun arcade racer, initially we were of the opinion of 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' by over complicating the controls. Countless times people picked up the controller and tried tilt for a spell before deciding it was a waste of time and revering back to the traditional controls.

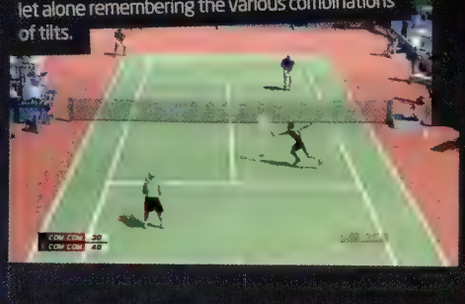
But perhaps in saying that we've identified the problem, we suspect the tilt controls need to be mastered to get the most out of the game and let's not forget this build is still in the development stages and yet to be refined.

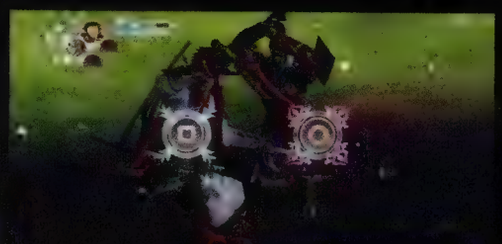
LAIR

The pick of the bunch as far as tilt is concerned, which is lucky considering the fact it's central to the control system. Move the pad on every axis to fly your dragon through the air, attack enemies and walk when mounted on the fire-breathing lizard. With the controls simple to master it's the first time we've felt the Sixaxis actually belonged in a game, although we certainly hope Factor 5 give us the option to switch to the Analogues for the on-foot sections as tilt just doesn't feel natural when stomping around.

VIRTUA TENNIS 3

A feature only recently added to the game and unfortunately remains unproven. Tilt the controller up, down, left and right to move your player around the court and then when in position snap the Sixaxis upwards for a lob, downwards for a slice and then left or right for top spin. Simple enough in principle, but we wonder how effective it will be in the heat of a lighting-fast rally when your fingers are working hard to reach the face buttons in time let alone remembering the various combinations of tilts.



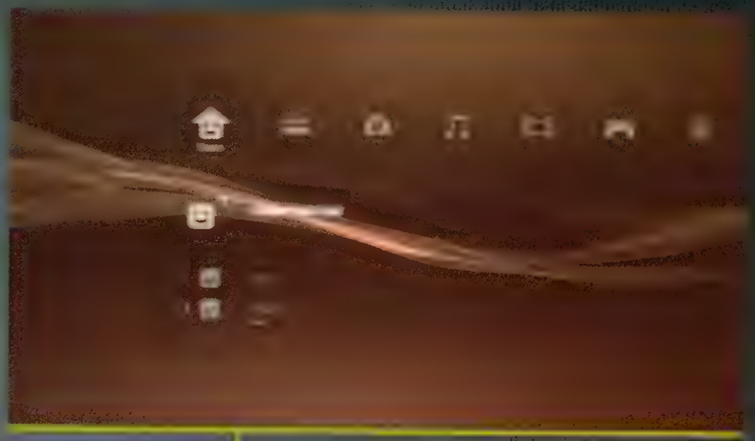


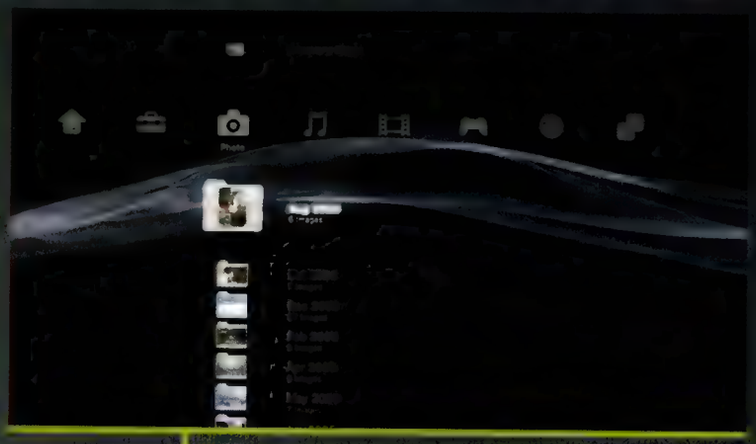
GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE

Unlike many of the other titles that utilise the tilt functionality, *Genji*'s use of it is more than a little rubbish. It's used instead of the right analogue stick to perform dodges and feints. Of course, the larger of the four characters doesn't respond well to dodging, making the whole effort feel useless at times.

XROSS MEDIA BAR

BAD SPELLING ASIDE, THE XMB IS THE KEY TO YOUR PS3'S FUNCTIONALITY AND,





USERS

After the Sony Computer Entertainment boot-up process is over we greeted with the User section. And it's easy to see why. To us, you might spend your first few fifty minutes or so here. Worth noting first is the colour of the XMB – it will change depending on the time of day – brown in the day blue at night.

USER SIGN IN Each user can have a password to differentiate between users on the same PS3. Each profile has personal settings, with the first user as the master profile. The master profile allows access to the full functionality of the system, whereas other users have restricted access. The online ID is also unique to each user. Each user can also have their own trophies and friends list.

PHOTO

PHOTO FOLDER Selecting a folder and pressing X brings a slideshow. The slideshow function, including the left and right buttons and the ability to pause the slideshow, is also available when viewing photos.

MEMORY STICK A PSP owner can store 1,000 photographs on their PSP by importing them over. You can also share images with your friends online. The images appear in folders listed beneath and in viewing the images Sony has created some intriguing slideshow features.

BOY, WHAT FUNCTIONS IT HAS!

INTERNET BROWSER

» The web browser may prove the most popular XMB function. It has a gorgeous blue display with urls running across the top of web pages and various appearing options to the right. It's practically the same as PC Internet browsing and it can be operated via the controller or USB keyboard and mouse.

VIDEO

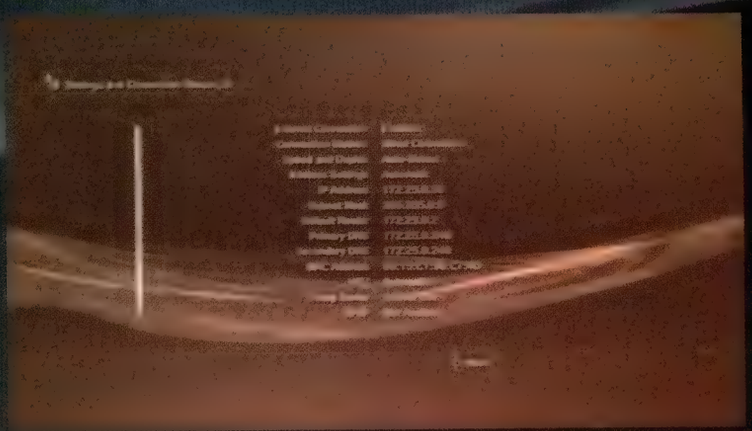
Obviously, this is also where you'll play your Blu-ray DVDs, downloaded film trailers, music videos and other such media. The good news for PSP owners is that things aren't that different on PS3. It also follows the same structure as the Photo and Game section, and utilises the same control as the Music player.

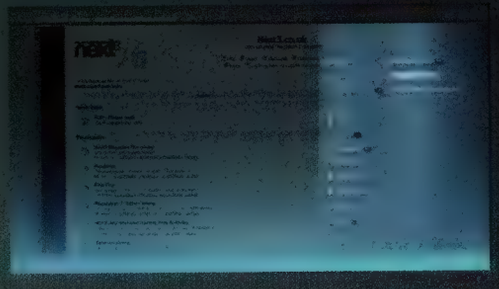
A Blu-ray DVD appears as a blue disc, with trailers and music videos showing up as animated thumbnails and the date, time and duration listed beside it. You can see what each file contains without having to enter it. We would prefer it if you could create different folders, though.

When playing the footage you can use features of the controller, much like the PS2's DualShock, as a remote. Pressing R1 and L1 will fast forward and rewind, while the R2 and L2 triggers skip chapters.

If you'd rather bring up the in-video menu you can press △ and have the familiar PSP menu show up. There's about a dozen options here, but it isn't as dense as the PS2's version. In short, like most things in the XMB, it's very easy to operate but needs a little work.

NETWORK





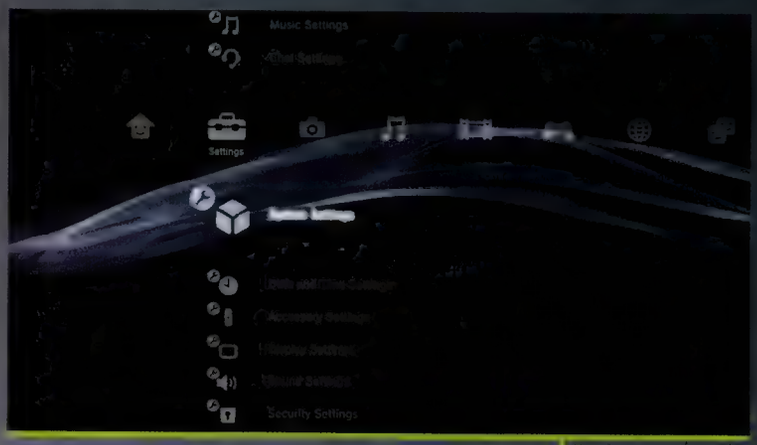
REMOTE PLAY » This enables PS3-to-PSP remote play, which is the ability to have all of the PS3's XMB functionality – including music, trailers and downloaded media – on your PSP. You can also transfer them via Wi-Fi on to your PSP.

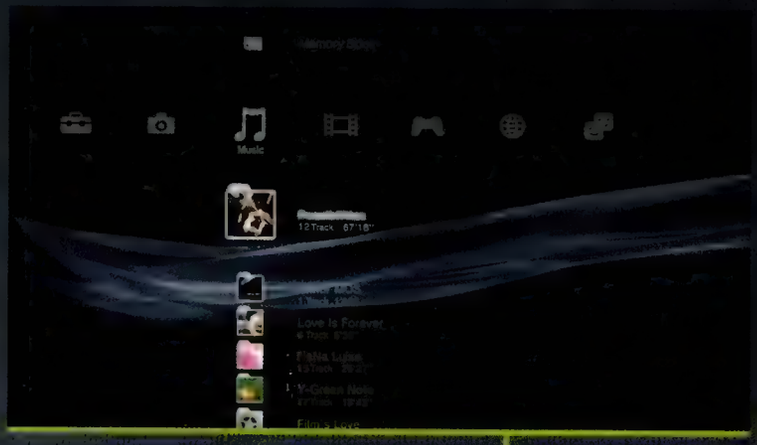
PLAYSTATION STORE » Here is where you'll be using your online wallet to download games for your unit. Unlike the Xbox 360, which operates under a fairly asinine money-for-points system, Playstation 3 is going to use cash. You won't have to work out how much a particular game is going to cost you.
All of the media stored on your PS3 is open to the PSP to use. One of the obvious benefits of this is that you won't be limited by the size of your memory stick as the PS3 unit acts as a hard drive.

ONLINE INSTRUCTION MANUAL » Sony has seen fit to include an online manual for its browser functions, despite its relative ease of use.

SYSTEM SETTINGS » Give the PS3 its own name, set the language options for the console and select from two user dictionaries (UK and US).

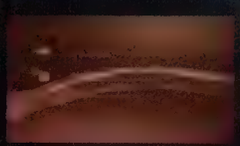
MUSIC FOLDER » In a similar style to the Photos' layout, you see the music albums displayed in folders. Even if it's just one track the Playstation 3 displays it in its own folder.





SETTINGS

SECURITY SETTINGS » Enable password protection to keep questionable content from anyone in particular.



ACCESSORY SETTINGS » Configure wireless Bluetooth devices such as keyboards, microphones, headsets and so on. We were surprised to find no option for keyboard and mouse; however, a future update may amend that.

SYSTEM UPDATE » Update the PS3's firmware via the Internet or Storage (for example; games with updates on them). This works much the same as on the PSP.

DATE AND TIME SETTINGS »

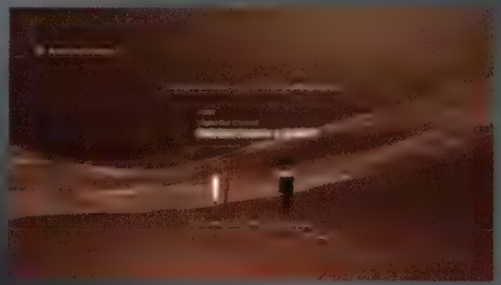
CHAT SETTINGS »

DISPLAY SETTINGS »

SOUND SETTINGS » Like Display Settings this is also self-explanatory. HDMI, Digital Optical and AV MULTI feature predominantly. Again, set between automatic or manual – the latter supporting Dolby 5.1, DTS 5.1 and so on.

MUSIC

MEMORY STICK » Photos, albums and other such music can be transferred over to the console via a Memory Stick.



GAME DATA UTILITY »» Game Date Utility and Save Date Utility both feature here. The latter is the same as it is on PSP – with saves being displayed as thumbnails, with date information and so on.

PLAYSTATION NETWORK »» Despite Sony stating PS3 network won't be named, this reveals it's actually called the Playstation Network. Here you can create your online profile and begin adding to your Friends list.

GAME

Navigating the PS3's Game section is the same as on the PSP, but there are some notable conclusions. Downloaded games – such as David Jaffe's *Calling All Cars* – will show up here, so you have to scroll down to them.

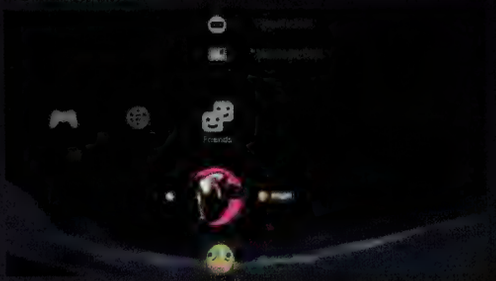
The only problem is that everything is just dropped here. It feels cumbersome having to sift through lots of content. Hopefully there will be an update that makes the layout simpler. Given that the PS3 is so upgradeable we wouldn't be surprised if Sony is already on the case.

BLUE GAME DISC »» The XMB wouldn't load straight into games. When we enter games the disc sign appears and we have to navigate to enter and press ⊗. However, this feature could be fixed, as when we highlight the game disc the XMB background wallpaper changes to that of the selected game.

SAVE DATE UTILITY »» As mentioned in the User section, save data is tied to your profile too. It's in this section you can also use and explore the PSone/PS2 saved data enabled via the external peripheral.

FRIENDS

When friends are online a blue circle is displayed next to their names, a red X for offline and a yellow clock for Away. Irrespective of whether they are on or offline you can peruse their profile details. There currently exists no way of dividing friends into categories but, to be fair, Xbox Live doesn't offer this feature either.



MESSAGE BOX »» You can communicate back and forth with friends using the Message Box and if you're used to instant messenger applications like AIM or MSN, this is going to be a walk in the park for you (especially if you have a keyboard and mouse connected).

As well as Text Chat you can use Mail, live Audio Chat and Video. Despite the XMB being condensed in game the wealth Friends options will still be available to you.

PLAYERS MET »» This lets you see gamers you've had the dis/pleasure of meeting online. From here you can add them to your list to improve your Buddy list or ban them.

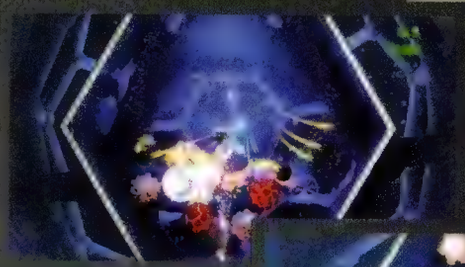
DOWNLOAD THIS!

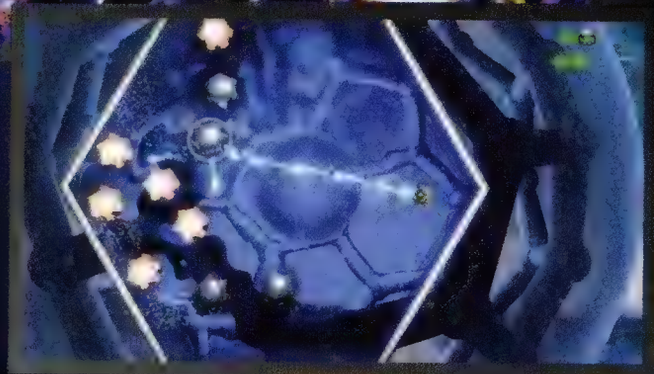
WHAT'S AVAILABLE TO BUY FROM THE PLAYSTATION STORE?

With Phil Harrison waxing lyrical about the array of downloads coming for the casual gamer, we've managed to get a look at a few of the titles due for download in the early days of the PlayStation Network. Here are our first impressions.

BLAST FACTOR

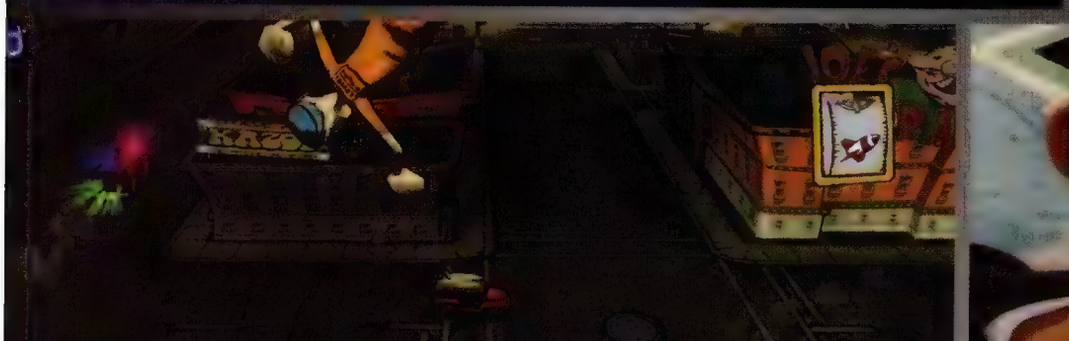
Blast Factor looks a little like the 360 smash, *Geometry Wars*, but there's a good deal more to it than simply blasting the crap out of geometric shapes. Admittedly that's the majority of it, but with the addition of the tilt functionality, you not only have control over your craft, but the sea of agar in which you're battling (the game's based in a Petri dish, you see). This can be used to catch aggressive viruses and bacteria to the side to create an advantageous situation.





FLOW

flOw is one of the most beautiful titles we've ever seen. Check out the screens and marvel at the stunning aesthetic. Munch blue organisms to go up and red to go down and search the sea for edibles to help you mutate into the largest creature you can - elegant, beautiful and calming. Boss battles are unlike anything you've seen before as well and are indescribably lovely. So much so we won't even try.



LEMMINGS 2

Hey, it's *Lemmings*. How well it'll transfer to the PS3 is questionable though, as if mouse control isn't supported, the classic *Lemmings* experience could be tarnished from the start. The dynamically lit levels seem to be a feature of this version, and with new levels as well as teleport and cloning gameplay mechanics, the experience should be far more complex than we've ever seen before.

SWIZZLEBLOCK

Sounding a bit like a daytime TV gameshow hosted by a D-list celeb, *Swizzleblock* is all about block swizzling. It's a multiplayer title with emphasis on trying to shaft your opponents with carefully placed turns and swizzles, whatever they are.

GO! SUDOKU

Well, it's *Sudoku*, isn't it? It's got 1000 puzzles with, presumably, more to download at a later date. There's a four-player mode and an animated background that "[demonstrates] the power of the PS3" and reacts to players moves. But, at the end of the day, it's still just *Sudoku*, love it or hate it.

PS3 STORE

Extended play

Gone are the days of forking out forty quid for the latest title, playing it, completing it and forgetting about it. With the Sony Store, the life of your games will be significantly extended with little downloads and microtransactions. Here are some bits and pieces we've heard about over the months.

RIDGE RACER >> Much like the 360 versions, we're not expecting a wealth of new tracks, but what we'll undoubtedly see is new cars and tunes.

SINGSTAR >> Not only will you be able to download new tunes and music videos from the Sony Store, tapping into the huge array of Sony's licensed musical talent, but there's the option of downloading other's performances for your delectation.

WARHAWK >> There's bound to be a few new craft and missions for download here, in addition to a new game mode or two.

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN >> There has been little news on the possibility of post-release downloads, past the fact that there will be some extra content. We're guessing the multiplayer level maps will feature highly.

LAIR >> Again with *Lair*, few specific have been announced, but so early on in the development cycle you can't blame Factor 5. The sad news is that it probably won't feature an online multiplayer mode.

So that's the first batch of online 'casual' games, and from first impressions, we're well pleased. It appears that all these titles support full 1080p HD at 60 fps, so there's little doubt they'll look as good as they play. The delivery system is as simple as it gets as well. With your online wallet you'll be able to purchase the games and have them ready to play within minutes via the Sony store. As is often the case, the most simple games are the most lasting, and at (we're guesstimating here) around £5- £10 we're sure they'll be amongst the best value purchases you'll ever make.

PERIPHERAL VISION

ADD-ONS AND TWEAKS FOR YOUR PS3 EXPERIENCE

SIXAXIS

Seven pads for seven brothers

While the intricacies of the Sixaxis (it's a palindrome, don't you know) are well known to all, it only recently occurred to us that the lights and controller ports stop a four, leaving the supposed idea of a seven-player multiplayer looking less likely. However, we need not fear, as the PS3 definitely supports up to seven players. Definitely. It's just a little bundle of clever you see, as although the lights on the pad only go up to four, those brainiacs at Sony R&D have come up with a system of notation to indicate player numbers. Player 5 lights up the player 4 and player 1 LEDs, player 6 lights 4 and 2 and so on. Pure genius. The accelerometers inside the unit work incredibly well, despite reports that the motion control wasn't as accurate as Sony were making out and nearly every title it's used in it enhances the experience significantly.

REMOTE CONTROL

Better than a Wii-mote

Okay, it looks like an ordinary remote control, and in many respects you'd be right. Indeed, one could argue that you'd be correct in every sense. It's Bluetooth and it controls your PS3, what more do you want? We would have liked Sony to have made the unit a little sexier, but perhaps they used all their sexy on the PS3 itself.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE

Tap, tap, squeak, squeak

While the PS2 had the ability to hook up to a keyboard and mouse, the PS3 will offer a more integrated service for everything from gaming to browsing to using applications. We're hoping many more games - specifically RTSs and FPSs – will support mouse and keyboard play to do away with all those irritating control issues.

PRINTERS

Get me all the copy

With the advent of the digital age, less of us buy the printed copies any more, but a USB printer could prove invaluable for both hardcore gamers and anyone looking to substitute their PC. Printing out web pages for your holiday details, getting a hard copy of that design you created in an image manipulation programme or just taking a shot of your favourite game in Photo mode to show in your album. The uses of a USB printer may not be immediately obvious but it's a handy thing to have around.

PSP

A marriage of convenience?

We still haven't got any real hands on time with the PS3's PSP connectivity just yet, but we have to say that until we're able to use the PS3's hardware to process information for use on the PSP, we probably won't be that excited. The other application we can't wait for is the ability to save your PS3 games and play them on the move. We're guessing the first title to use this will be a footy manager game.

MEMORY DEVICES

A trip down memory lane

There are a wealth of memory transfer methods, and you're guaranteed that whichever type you happen to use, Sony will have a PlayStation-branded 'gaming' version ready for purchase. However, most people know nowadays, that you'll be able to use your standard PSP stick or flash memory from your camera, so you'll always have the means to take your favourite *GTHD* motor round your mates.

LOCATION FREE

Get out and about. Or not

We were never that energized about the LocationFree kit once we'd had the chance to get it up and running, as a major part of it just didn't work. We've yet to discover if it features as a partner to the PS3, but it would make sense to use the technology in tandem to deliver a complete multimedia experience at home and abroad.

CAMERAS

Snap happy

We've never been truly amazed by a slideshow feature on a PC, but the sheer brilliance of the PS3's method of picture delivery is just pure genius. Rather than just presenting a series of images fading or wiping into each other, one of the PS3's slideshows drops Polaroid images onto a white background and simply pans around. This is a beautiful way of showing anything you manage to snap on your camera.

EYETOY

Eye, eye, what's all this then?

The *EyeToy* displayed at E3 to show off *Eye Of Judgement* was not the finished article, being an almost entirely different peripheral. The technology behind the *EyeToy 2* is truly remarkable. Able to identify body movement, eye movement and even recognise who's in front of the camera, the *EyeToy 2* will open the way for all manner of innovative game mechanics. Accurate enough to identify individual muscle movements to the point of spotting the emotional state of the user, *EyeToy 2* should make a massive impact on the PS3.

PHONES

Fones 4 U

The PS3 is an all-over Bluetooth device, which means you'll be able to Bluetooth the hell out of it from your mobile phone. Too lazy to take your memory card out of your mobile phone to upload your drunken pics? Just 'tooth 'em over from the comfort of your sofa. As we've been investigating, you may also be able to navigate through the system with your phone.

VOX POPS

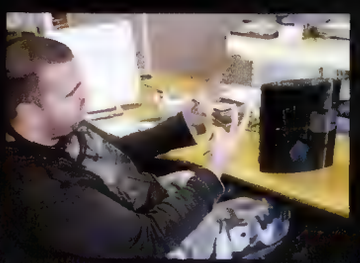
IS 3 A CROWD PLEASER? WE QUIZ THE NEXT3 OFFICE TO FIND OUT

ASHLEY DAY
Staff Writer, *GamesTM*
This is the machine that'll magically bring *Virtua Fighter 5* to my house and for that I love it. Now if only there was a decent arcade stick...

JON DENTON
Games Ed, *GamesTM*
The PS3 is big, bold, black and a little boring. I want to see the truly AAA games before I invest.

JOHN SZCZEPANIAK
Staff Writer, *Retro Gamer*
Despite being on Retro Gamer, I love modern games! *Resistance* didn't impress me much, but with strong Japanese support and *MGS4*, the PS3 is my console of choice. Bring on the wacky and obscure games!

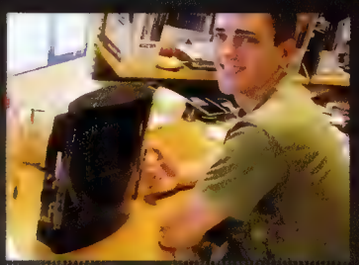
SIMON MILLER
Staff Writer *nRevolution*
The PS3 is a lot bigger than I thought – in fact it's massive. There's no doubt the launch games look very pretty; it's just a shame that the real must-haves aren't here till next year.



RYAN KING
Community Editor, *X360*
I'm not interested in PS3, because asides from *Virtua Fighter 5*, there are no games I want that I can't get on Xbox 360. *Gears Of War*? Xbox 360. *Call Of Duty 3*? Xbox 360 now. *F.E.A.R.*? Xbox 360 now.

HENRIETTA ROWLATT
Senior Staff Writer, *Edge*
Four hundred pounds for the chance to play *MGS4*? I'm not sure I'm going to forfeit all sense of reason for a shiny black box, but I'll admit it keeps me tempted.

MARK PODD
Staff Writer *360 Magazine*
It's got a reassuring sense of bulk and sturdiness to it, which with its shiny finish gives it a feel of quality. And *MotorStorm* seems to be pretty good as well.

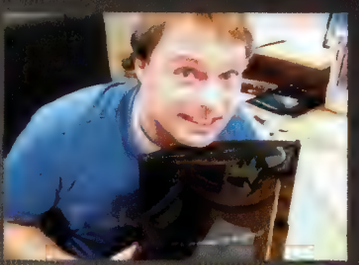


ANDY MOUNTAIN
Senior Designer, *Go>Play*
With a lengthy delay, a huge size and a hefty price tag I have to say I'm not all that impressed with the PS3. I'd prefer to get a 360 instead, as it has plenty of games I'm interested in and is already on the shelves.

IAN GORNALL
Circulation Manager
For me, the PS3 is priced too steeply – even for a next-gen console. But I'd happily hand over £250 for it, even if it means waiting till Xmas 07 – the bonus being that more games will be available.

GAVIN MACKENZIE
Staff Writer, *Official*
its convex shape [illegible] gives a real boost to my da[illegible] self-esteem.

ADAM SMITHSON
Senior Advertising Executive
[illegible] itself as a games console.



JORDAN TRAVERS
Designer, *Powerstation*
So good I would put my name on it! Apart from the fact that when I saw the PS3 I was reaching for the tuna and cheese to make one of my legendary toasties (thinking it was my George Forman grill) it looks very nice.

NATASHA ROSS
Production Artworker
The new PS3 looks very sleek and shiny, it's actually a lot bigger and heavier than I thought it would be, but it's solid design gives the impression that you're getting a lot for your money!

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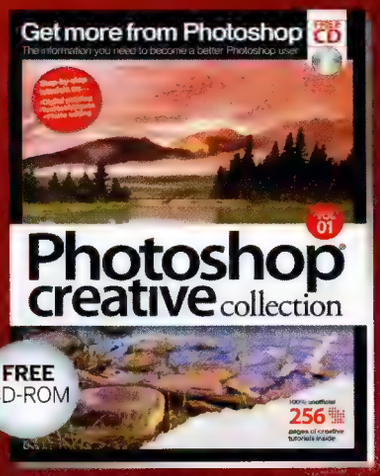

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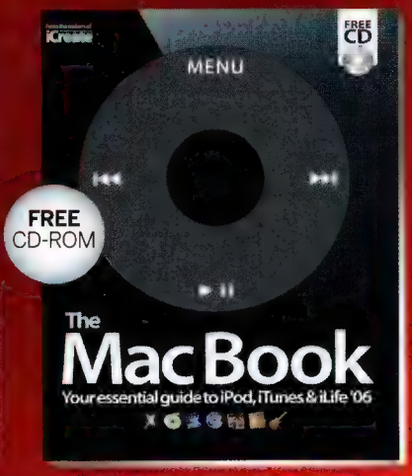

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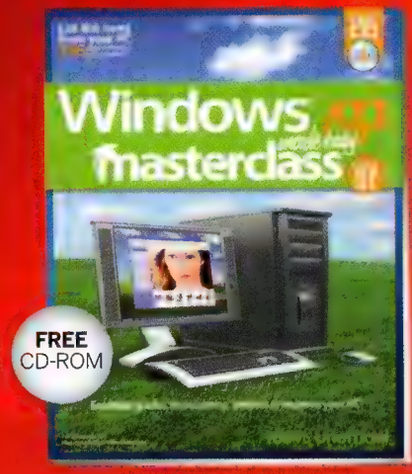

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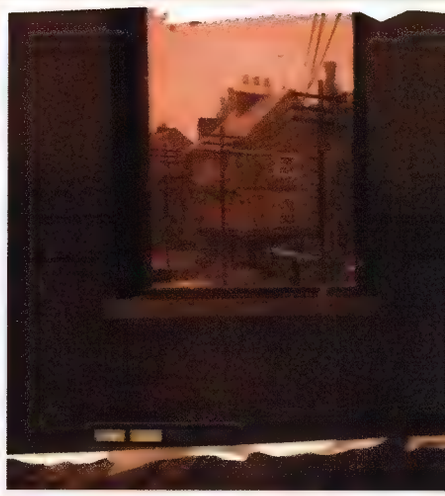


Resistance: Fall Of Man

Why do we fall, Mr Hale? To learn to pick ourselves up

PS3 **Publisher**//Sony **Developer**//Insomniac **Genre**// Action **Players**//1-4 (2-40 online) **Website**//www.insomniacgames.com **Release Date**//March

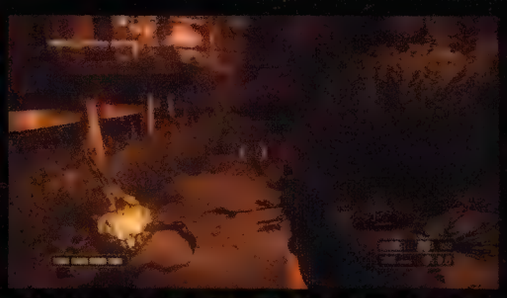
THE phenomenal impact of *Halo* on the success of the Xbox has created unfair expectations of any action game – specifically a first-person shooter – released at the launch of a new console. Few games have ever enjoyed the success of Bungie's epic, and while it certainly has its critics, few examples of the genre have ever been as good. The next-generation console war has barely begun, and with the stakes so high, the creation of hype is of paramount importance to maximising profit. For developers, however, hype is a ball and chain, creating outrageous levels of expectation that the vast majority of games couldn't come close to fulfilling. *Gears Of War* is currently being criticised for not changing the landscape of the industry, a stance that would be treated as hideously unfair if applied to any other title. Had Halo been even ten per cent weaker, rest assured public opinion of it would have sunk by a much larger degree.

This is the situation Insomniac finds itself in with *Resistance: Fall Of Man*. Few would suggest that the PS3 launch line-up is stellar, hampered as it is by several high-profile delays and the late arrival of exclusive franchises like *Metal Gear Solid* and *Devil May Cry*, and *Resistance* has been touted as its great white hope for appealing to the lucrative action market. Initial reports have ranged from mildly enthusiastic to cruelly dismissive, but having spent more than enough time with the game to learn its foibles, we at Next3 would like to throw our hat into the ring – *Resistance* looks set to be a very good game, perhaps even an excellent one. It is certainly more impressive, both visually and in terms of scale, than the equivalent Xbox 360 launch title, *Call Of Duty 2*, and suggests that we can expect great things from Sony's box of tricks in the future.

An opening cut-scene sets up the story: it is 1951, the Second World War never happened, and the human race is under threat from the Chimera, murderous aliens invading the Earth and spreading a deadly virus. With most of the world colonised, the last line of resistance falls right here in Blighty, with Nathan Hale – an American, for some reason. The opening level takes place in York, the ominous grey skies,

next IN LINE LEVEL 2: YORK

The first level opens with some simplistic fire-fights along narrow streets. It's a learning experience, but with no health pickups, it is still quite a challenge.



After descending into a dry canal bed you are confronted by swarms of scorpion-like creatures - easy to kill, but fast, and there are masses of them.

At the end of the canal you come to platform with Chimera firing down on you from an elevated position. Kill them and you can progress into the ruined houses.

PS3 LAUNCH GAME

Most of the weapons in *Resistance* are innovative. We still like the machine gun, though.

next IN LINE

Inside the houses you'll take fire from above and below, as there are gaping holes in almost every floor. A good chance to improve your aim and reaction times.

This close-quarters fighting leaves ample opportunities for gruesome face-to-face showdowns. You see that blood? We did that.

The game has great rag-doll physics, and each body will stay in that spot and that position no matter how many times you backtrack or how long you take.

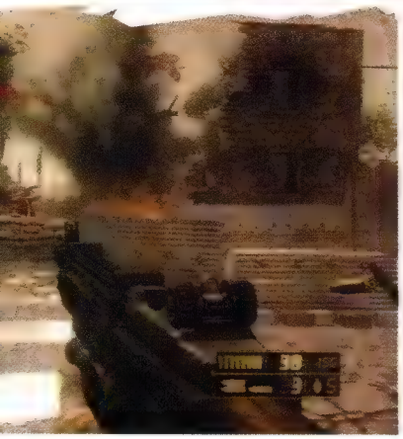
The Chimera wear breathing apparatus to protect them from Earth's toxic atmosphere.

next IN LINE LEVEL 3: GRIMSBY

From the very beginning it is clear that Grimsby will present an altogether different experience to York – darker, more atmospheric, and with new enemies

These pathetic wretches are slaves in the Chimeran processing facility. They are unarmed, but tend to hide before popping out of the shadows to take a chunk out of your neck.

Keep an eye out for metallic pads on the ground. They shoot floating balls into the air that fire lasers at you. One shot will be enough, but they're difficult to spot.



rows of destroyed terraced houses and panicked British soldiers evoking powerful associations with the Blitz. An alien ship flies overhead and smashes into a building behind you. Debris is strewn all over the length and breadth of the narrow street, providing excellent opportunities for cover, and when you encounter the first enemies you will soon see why. Humanoid in appearance with gas tanks mounted on their backs, even the lowliest Chimera are formidable opponents. Superior AI makes them accurate marksmen and, as they are constantly moving, difficult to hit. Every second out of cover we were taking fire, and with no health pick-ups on the first level – there are in every level that follows – it pays to be cautious. You'll start the game with an M582 Carbine, a machine gun with a mounted grenade launcher, the standard human weapon. After a few chances to engage with the enemy we came across the Bullseye, a Chimeran weapon, the alternate firing mode of which allows you to shoot a homing beacon that will draw all subsequent shots directly to it. The upshot of this is that you can effectively shoot round corners – an example of the innovation Insomniac has attempted to bring to the game's weaponry (see boxout).

After fighting you way through the town you come to what appears to be an empty and overgrown canal. A cut-scene shows your platoon being attacked by the Chimera's parasites, infecting them and leaving everyone but you in a coma. After joining with some British soldiers you advance along the canal bed and encounter scuttling, scorpion-like Chimera. They are small and have no range weapons, but move sufficiently quickly and in such large numbers that shooting them all without being attacked was extremely difficult. After clearing some more ruined houses of the humanoid Chimera and advancing into the street, we were able to able to climb into a tank. Not only does the tank hint at the varied gameplay we can expect, it also provided an excellent showcase for the game's superb physics. *Resistance*'s visuals may be some way off the heights being hit by *Call Of Duty 3* and *Gears Of War* but they do retain an air of stylised individuality. The physics, however, are second to none, the tiny pieces of debris created by each explosion a testament to the PS3's powers. The real joy of the way *Resistance* looks is all in the details. Shoot the windows and each one will break in a completely different way; turn a corner and be greeted by a flock of lovingly rendered pigeons. They are small, elements that could easily go unnoticed, but Insomniac has clearly taken great pains to make its virtual world as immersive and coherent as possible.

The first few levels flow directly into each other, and are kept short and limited to small environments. This all changed in the next level, "Spires". Virtually the entire stage played out in a single location, an abandoned bus station. Vehicles are spread liberally across the enormous playing area, with several fuel stations just waiting to ignite at the slightest hint of a stray bullet. Marooned in the centre with a small squad of soldiers, we had to hold our position against an expected attack. When the Chimera struck, they did so from all sides, making full use of the abundant space and ample cover to create the most memorable battle of the game thus far. Previous to this, the levels had taken place along a variety of narrow streets and in claustrophobic rooms; this was the first time we'd actually had the opportunity to see the sheer scale that *Resistance* is capable of, and we are practically bursting with happiness to tell you that each subsequent level provided a set-piece of similar grandeur.

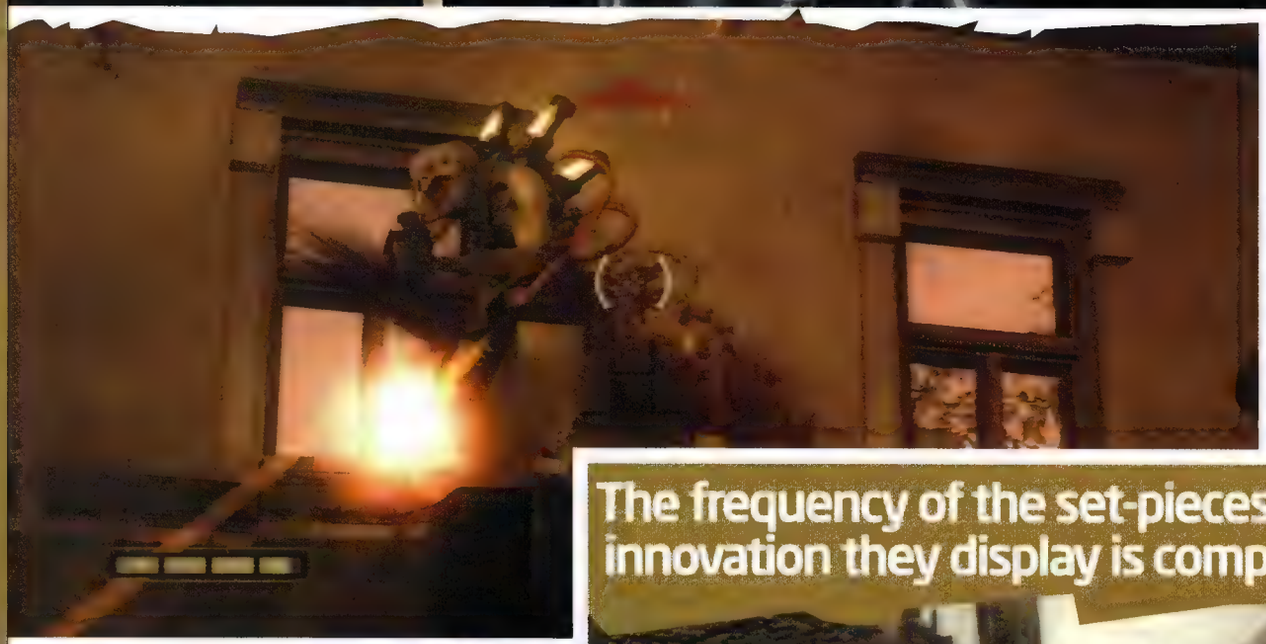
The bus station fight brought about a change in location, as Nathan Hale headed south to Grimsby. There is a strange satisfaction in seeing such unglamorous British locations as Grimsby used in a major videogame, particularly when the developer has taken such care to capture the look of each place – Insomniac even acknowledged Grimsby's reputation for fresh fish by including chalkboards with various sea life and prices scrawled in the design of several

next IN LINE

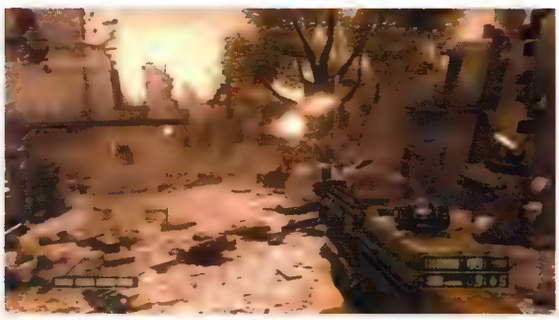
It isn't long before the game is throwing both elements at you simultaneously. They're easy to deal with, but provide a good sense of variety.

After dispatching a few wretches and a handful of mines you encounter a more open, factory-like environment where considerable danger awaits.

With Chimera placed on raised walkways, you'd better have a decent aim. The situation calls for accurate, long-distance shooting and good movement.



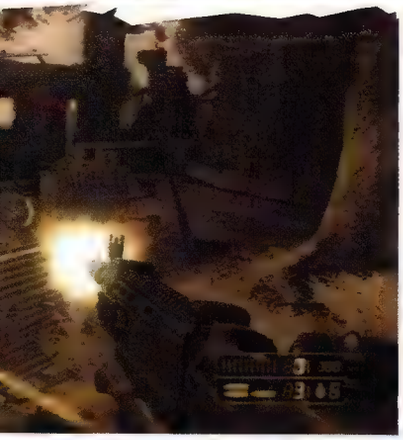
The frequency of the set-pieces and the innovation they display is compelling



The game creates a unique visual style by juxtaposing war-time imagery with science-fiction.

next-GEN MOMENT

In a genre as established as the FPS it's difficult to innovate, and, besides its scale, *Resistance*'s major advance is in its physics. It is evident in every explosion, bullet hole, and destroyed Chimeran corpse, but we still can't stop shooting the windows. Breaking in an entirely unique way every time, this is a level of detail the PlayStation 2 couldn't hope to achieve.



Enemy AI is great. The Chimera duck, weave and actively search for cover.

of the buildings. As well as being the location of the first night levels, and marking our first encounter with the satisfyingly powerful shotgun and the 'hedgehog' grenade (a kind of nail bomb), Grimsby also granted us a glimpse into the inner life of the enemy. The Chimera have converted the factories on Grimsby's docks into a plant for changing captured humans into braindead drones. This was the game's first attempt at fantastical level design, and is accomplished with hideous imagination and considerable aplomb. Cunningly referencing HR Giger's biomechanical designs for *Alien*, the world of the Chimera is a grim spectacle – vast glowing orbs, grinding machinery, mangled corpses, and huge luminescent tubes transporting cocooned human bodies into the depths of the facility. The braindead drones lock you into their grasp and bite at your neck should you stray too close, requiring a firm shake of the Sixaxis pad before you are released.

The action then moves to Manchester, where a full daytime assault is under way. This was the level showcased at E3 and marks a clear step up in terms of intensity of combat. Beginning with an electrifying charge amidst masses of human soldiers towards Chimeran forces in front of a row of dilapidated houses, this is the closest the game got to feeling like World War II. The width of the fighting is immediately striking, with the skirmish taking place across a front offering several possible routes. The use of space is brilliant, with each route offering an experience that feels fresh and entirely individual. Fighting continues through the streets until a final set-piece on a bridge leading to Manchester Cathedral. The climax of the level presents another new enemy – this time a large creature, reminiscent of a wolf, which required evasive thinking and a few well-placed grenades to defeat.

The frequency of the set-pieces and the innovation they display is utterly compelling, and the cavernous interior of the cathedral saw us faced with masses of the scorpion Chimera climbing down the walls and towards our position. The numbers were overwhelming and it was impossible not to take damage, but no sooner had we killed every last one than the doors were blown inwards to reveal two humanoid Chimera, much larger this time, carrying a weapon called the Auger, which fires a blast of radiation that can penetrate any cover. They were not much more powerful than the enemies we'd already encountered, but the Auger made it impossible to hide, making them that much more difficult to defeat and very costly to our health.

Our time in Manchester ended with a quite brilliant stand-off between a handful of human soldiers and masses of Chimera in a huge, open square, climaxing with the introduction of a 'Walker' – a massive, spider-like machine with twin machine guns. The only way to destroy it was to use the cover that ringed the square to sneak up behind it, giving us a clear shot at its exposed power core.

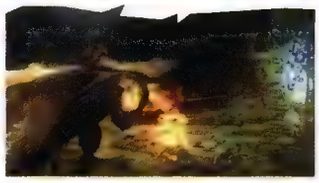
We have played only a small section of the game and yet *Resistance* already impresses us. We expected something big, and we have been justly rewarded. There is a sense of pace about this that is just irresistible. Each stage was more involving and exhilarating than the last, with a steady drip of new enemies, weapons and machines to ensure that taking a break will be the furthest thing from you mind. More exciting than anything we saw, though, is what we've yet to see. Should the rest of *Resistance* continue at this pace, with the same level of quality and innovation in its set-pieces, then Insomniac might just have created a worthy rival to the mighty *Gears Of War*.

anticipation

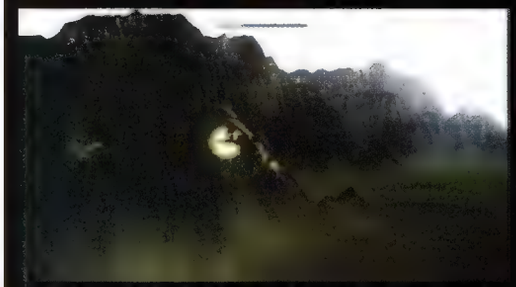
Insomniac has allayed the initial fears over the quality of the graphics with a supremely playable and exciting game. Every console needs a great game at its launch – this looks set to be Sony's.

next-GEN MOMENT

There's plenty of pretty things to look at when touring around on the back of your dragon, but apart from the high-def visuals and use of Sixaxis we can't think of too many things that couldn't have been achieved on the last generation of hardware. The one thing that did impress was the scale of the bridge battle, there's an amazing amount of activity going on and you can drop in and out of it at will.



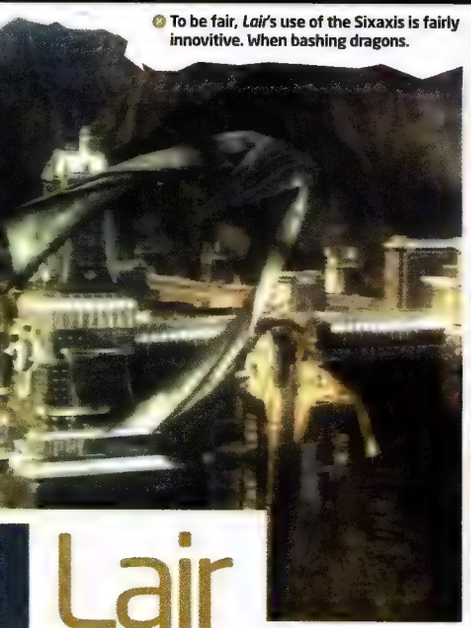
next IN LINE WAY OF THE DRAGON



Shark around the sky for potential targets, then approach. When you're close a white halo will appear around the victim. Then press either shoulder buttons to lock them in your sights.

With your enemy in sight now is the time for you to strike, hit the ⊗ button repeatedly to make up some ground (or rather air) fast.

When you reach your target and you're side-by-side, thrust the Sixaxis in his direction to knock him off balance and cause damage. Some opponents take more of a beating than others.



To be fair, *Lair*'s use of the Sixaxis is fairly innovitive. When bashing dragons.

Lair

Is Sony's dragon adventure hot or not?

PS3 **Publisher**// Sony **Developer**//Factor 5 **Genre**//Action **Players**//TBA
Website//www.sony.com **Release Date**//TBA

WITH so many games coming in and out of the office this month, Factor 5's *Lair* is probably the one game to have divided opinions the most. Some object to having to go 'all Nintendo' and shake the controller to within an inch of its life, whereas others revelled in the chance to indulge in an experience that plays to the Sixaxis' strengths, rather than simply making it look like the bastard child of DualShock. And if nothing else, that's what we've gained from playing *Lair*, the realisation that while the motion sensing may not be the best substitute for force feedback, if implemented correctly it can work well and provides an element of interactivity never experienced on a console before.

Lucky for us though, we did take plenty more from our time with *Lair*. The demo we played contained a tutorial teaching Dragon Flight 101 and part of a proper level where a battle rages between two armies on a bridge. Jumping into the level without first learning the basics isn't a wise move, so it's best to complete the short training section before wading into battle. The first thing you notice is how impressive it looks. But the point of the tutorial isn't to show off the scenery, it's to teach you the controls. First guide your dragon 'PilotWings' style through a series of mid-air rings by tilting the pad left and right to bank your beast in the corresponding directions. Pretty simple and it's doesn't get any more complex, tap the ⊗ button for a speed boost and R2 acts as a brake making it easier to perform tight turns.

Once the basics of flight are mastered, it's onto combat. When a target is in range a white halo appears around them, that acts your cue to press L1 or R1 and lock on; when holding the shoulder button, tap ⊗ to close in where you can singe them with your fire-breath or thrust the Sixaxis in its direction to engage in some airborne melee moves. When you've caused sufficient damage to your foe, the perspective moves in for a close-up and you must press the face buttons to perform the attack combos. The last part of the combo is the 'killing move' where you're treated to an interactive cut-scene in which you must tap a face button when the screen edge flashes red. If completed, your jockey can finish his foe in any manner of brutal ways.

When you've earned your wings it's time to enter the battle that gives us a much better idea of what the final game will be like. Two armies are fighting for dominance and the whole scene looks a little like medieval meets middle earth. But this section is designed to show you *Lair*'s ground-based combat, which unfortunately isn't as intuitive as the aerial manoeuvres. An on-screen morale meter shows your level of success, once the bar fills in your favour the battle is over. However, using the Analogue sticks to move your dragon here would be a much better option than using to tilt, as the urge to move the sticks is too overpowering, so you spend most of the time thrashing the camera about.

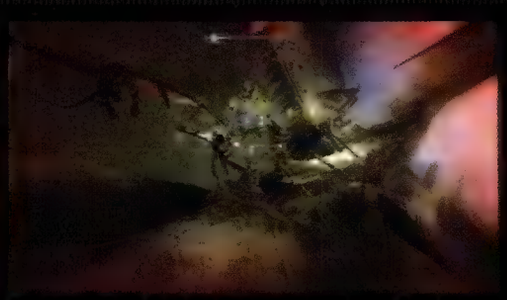
While this is still early code, we can certainly see the potential here. From our play test it's obvious the key to *Lair*'s success is striking a balance between the aerial and ground combat sections, keep it quick and punchy and *Lair* should be a winner, but make it too repetitive and the player's interest could go up in smoke.

anticipation

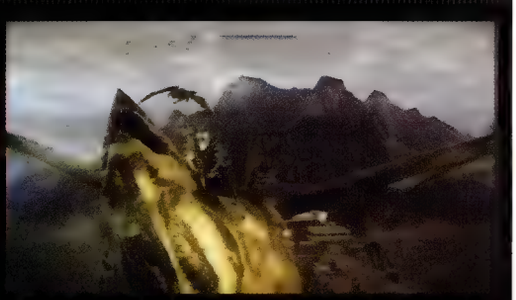
Lair holds a lot of promise and the use of the Sixaxis gives it a unique edge, but we hope some use of Analogue controls make it into the final game. If the work rate's kept up, this should be hot property.

next IN LINE

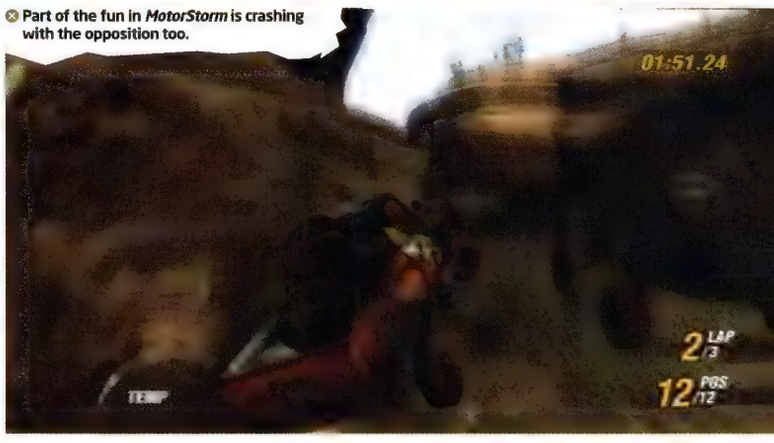
For the penultimate melee move, the camera perspective moves in closer and you go claw-to-claw with your opponent. Tap the face buttons or tilt the Sixaxis to take him down.



The 'Killing Move' is a God Of War-style mini game. Tap a button in time with onscreen prompts. Get it wrong and your enemy escapes, get it right and a scripted death sequence plays out.

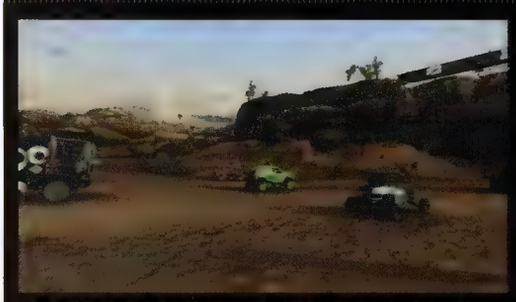


Once the death has been dealt you're free to go about your business, but if you've taken any damage then try landing and eating a few enemy troops to regain health. Umm, troops.



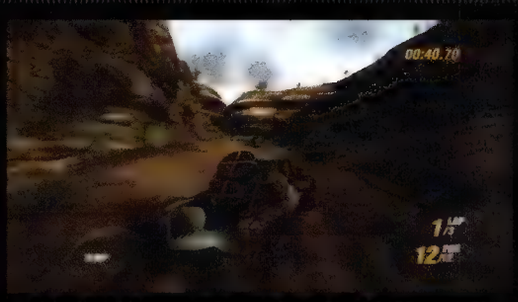
Part of the fun in *MotorStorm* is crashing with the opposition too.

next IN LINE TICKET TO RIDE... OR DRIVE

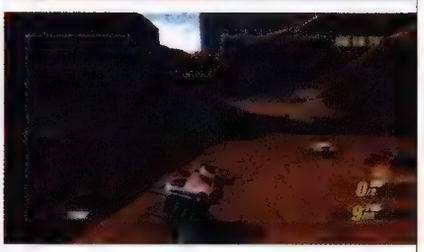


At the start of the race you're given a preliminary cut-scene showing the starting area of the track and the vehicles that will take part. Cinematic and epic camera angles galore!

The race starts and all the vehicles pile up together, shunting one another as they get out of the starting area. Apart from the crashes this is one of the more brutal areas in a race.



In the thick of it now, the herd dividing up. The atmosphere becomes calmer and it's time to explore the courses. Pick routes and remember them for the next lap.



MotorStorm

It's definitely going to cause one

PS3 **Publisher**//Sony **Developer**//Evolution Studios **Genre**//Racing **Players**//1–15
Website//www.motorstorm.com **Release Date**//March

SOME games were made for tilt and some weren't – that's a truth we've come to realise over the past few months as more and more preview code arrived in our office. With *MotorStorm*, despite Tom's very loud protestations to the contrary ("It's fun! It's fun!"), it's unfortunately a case of the latter. *MotorStorm* was an obvious victim of its development cycle commencing well before Sony revealed plans for tilt in its new controller; this is something that absolutely shines through when you're attempting to manoeuvre around the massive tracks, arms aching as you try to treat the Sixaxis like some sort of makeshift steering wheel. But it just doesn't work. Thank God you have the option to turn it off then, as it's only after doing so you'll come to appreciate the game's awesome destructive carnage.

After a brief but well-made introductory sequence, featuring the audio delights of Lunatic Calm, the game begins properly. Events are referred to as Tickets, each comprising several individual races. Some let you choose the vehicle you want to race in and others task you with using a specific kind. Coming in the top three at the end of each race awards you points. These all relate to a final score you need to reach before you can unlock other Tickets and ultimately other races. There are around two-dozen Tickets in total. After you've selected the set of races you want to compete in, the next step is the Vehicle Selection menu. You're free to choose from a wide array, including; trucks, bikes, dirt bikes, buggies, cars and more. The animated menus are gorgeous, letting you see your vehicle up close. Every new vehicle rides up onto a rock podium and respawns each kind you choose. It's a good preliminary show-off for the vehicle graphics and, to a lesser extent, the physics.

It's worth pointing out that the menus don't list any statistics for the vehicles. This isn't a game about building up stats, but some may prefer to have an indication of which vehicle is most suited to a particular environment. We are not sure if the final game will enable this; but to be honest, it didn't matter one iota once the racing actually began. Vehicles react differently to varying terrain, forcing you to remember the various dirt rather than which of the vehicles are best for the location.

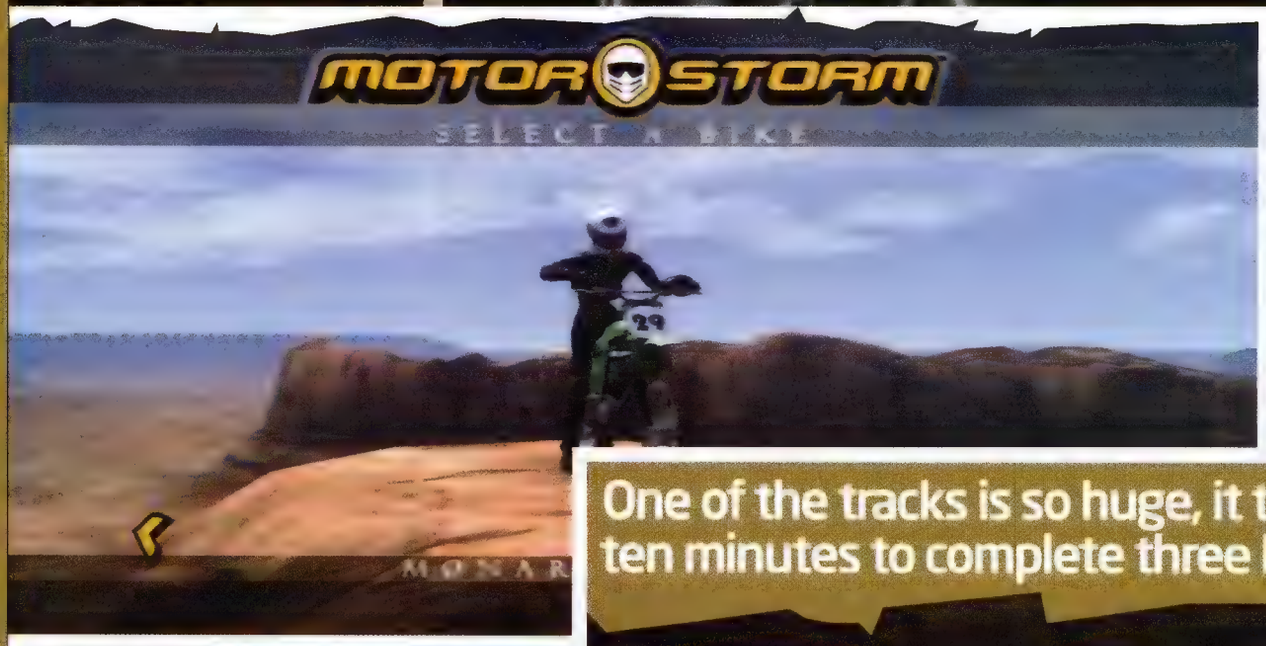
Having had plenty of preview code for *MotorStorm* over the last few months, our biggest concern was the lack of any sense of speed. Early code just didn't feel fast, irrespective of whether you were boosting or not and therefore wasn't any fun. Sure, it looked great – but how important are graphics when the gameplay doesn't stack up? However, now... well, now things are different. The game feels faster even if you aren't boosting and it looks even better than before. Trucks, the slowest vehicles in the game, move quicker than in previous versions and the majority of the other vehicles have definitely had their limits extended too. Bikes in particular are deadly. They are now at a stage

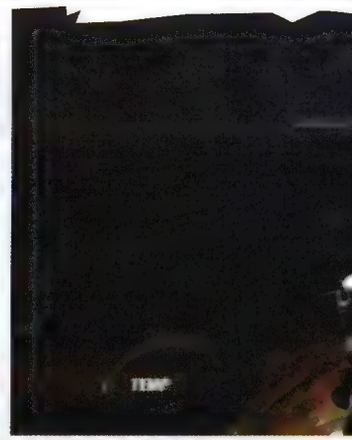
next IN LINE

Taking a turn too fast and now we're a steaming pile of wreckage. The physics are truly amazing – layers stripping away from your car as it careens through the air.

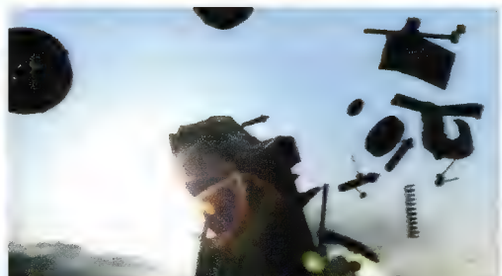
Back in the race again, with a dodgy see-through vehicle indicating that you've spawned back into the race. It's time to get your speed on and compete for first again.

Pushing your boost to limit will result in your car exploding... this is also the perfect way to cross the finish line, hopefully in first place too.





Even without the use of boost, the sense of speed here is wonderfully immense.



next-GEN MOMENT

It sounds like such a superfluous thing to highlight but the Havoc physics in *MotorStorm* are truly some of the most unbelievable we've seen in a next-gen game. The crashes eclipse anything established in other destructive racing games such as *Burnout Revenge*, *FlatOut* and *Destruction Derby*. But physics also apply to the way the vehicles handle and manoeuvre. Suffice it to say, they're clearly next gen.

⊗ *MotorStorm* sometimes lets you blend different vehicles within some races.

where you must concentrate and premeditate corners, otherwise you'll slam head or butt first into one.

The best thing about controlling any vehicle in *MotorStorm* is how right it feels on the Sixaxis. The L2 and R2 triggers are wonderful for a game such as this, holding them down gives you a greater sense of immersion. Okay, so we miss the rumble feature more than we appreciate the tilt pad functionality and rumble *would* have been excellent in this, but holding both triggers – L2 for brake and R2 for accelerate respectively – is immersive for its own reasons. It will be interesting to see what becomes of a game like *SSX* on Sixaxis as the triggers feel different and distinctly separate from L1 and R1. But *MotorStorm* puts an emphasis on using them, pressing them all the way down, which is why tilt feels so bad. But the standard controls are perfect.

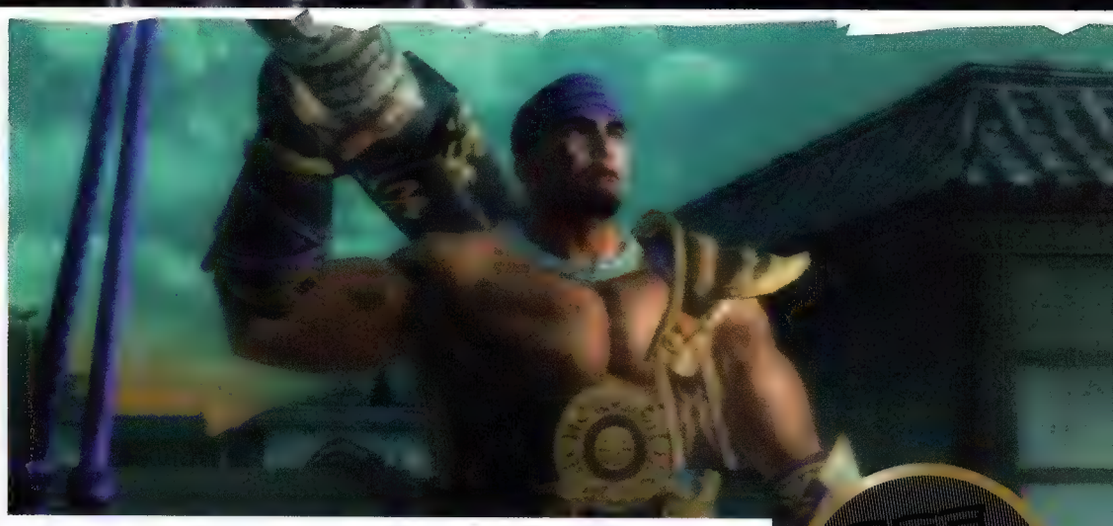
The tracks we played are mostly excellent. We say mostly because the ones that aren't were problematic due to our own ineptitude with vehicle stipulations (sometimes you must use a particular vehicle and we were hopeless with any kind of bike or truck). One of the tracks was so huge and open-ended that it took us nearly ten minutes to complete its three laps. Thankfully, there's little chance of you getting lost. That said, it really is a case of learning the best routes rather than the tracks themselves, because if you were to draw a top-down picture of what the tracks looked like, the majority of them would probably appear like veins.

One particular track also contained our favourite *MotorStorm* moment. There's always a brief section of acclimatisation when starting a new race, especially if you've changed vehicle – arbitrarily or otherwise. Having not found our rhythm – at all – in this particular race, we ended up smashing head-on into a corner and watched as our car careened through the air in *Matrix*-like slow motion. As if the next-gen physics weren't enough to impress us, a lady on a dirt bike came riding so close to the flying wreck that she actually ducked underneath it, keeping her head right down as we passed overhead. As she narrowly escaped wipeout she turned and gave a little wave to our wreckage. It was like the icing on the cake, and thanks to the slow motion, she appeared like a scene from a film. It was perfect and a clear embodiment of the sort of game this is: pure visceral and destructive fun. Reacting with the other racers is always enjoyable and we swear we were even flipped the bird once.

It was shortly after this moment that we came to regret certain omissions from the game. *MotorStorm* puts such an emphasis on its destruction, explosions and crashes that it sometimes feels like a canyon racer version of *Burnout*. Unlike Criterion's series, *MotorStorm* doesn't enable you to direct your wreckage through the air after you've been taken out or crashed. It would have made situations such as the one with the biker sweeter had we been able to drop down and crush her, wiping that hypothetical smile from her face. But this isn't *Burnout*. *MotorStorm* is its own thing and that's raw, brutal and brilliant fun.

anticipation

We can't deny we weren't looking forward to *MotorStorm*. But having played near-to-finished code we're confident this will be a winner for Sony. A raw, dirty and destructible winner.



Genji: Days Of The Blade

PS3 LAUNCH GAME

A whole lot of flailing, dancing and crystals...

Publisher// Sony **Developer**// Game Republic **Genre**// Beat-'em-up **Players**// 1 **Website**// www.sony.com **Release Date**// March

THERE'S always one isn't there? One that ruins it for everyone else. While all the other PS3 games are screaming for your attention there's always one skulking in the background muttering things like "Don't care, didn't want to be next-gen anyway. PS wee more like, huh". And in this case it's *Genji: Days Of The Blade*.

It's a sequel to the PS2 game that you might have played after not having your fix of endless sword battles with armies of soldiers quenched by any of the *Dynasty Warriors* games. So you can expect a lot more of that almost-continuous button mashing as you hero flails wildly with whatever weapon they're equipped with. Thankfully, the code we were supplied with is mercifully short and ends just as the first giant crab waves its massive pinchers in the main protagonist's face. But it did give us an idea of how the game will play out and how short a time it will stay in PS3's next March.

For a game that's about slicing up demonic soldiers with a variety of bladed weapons, there is a heck off a lot of pink in it. This is mostly due to the strange crystals that transform the members of the Heishi clan from sword-wielding psychos into sword-wielding psychos with pink bits sticking out of them. This clan was supposed to be killed off during the last game when you mashed them to death, but some how they're back and it's up to the members of the Genji clan to battle them once again.

You get four different characters to play as, each with their own special weapons and fighting styles. Yoshitsune is the main hero of the group; he's armed with two samurai swords and uses them to great effect, so great an effect that you'll barely bother using the other three heroes. You can switch to them with a push of the D-pad, but it seems pointless.

Shizuka's main gimmick is that she fights as if she is dancing. Armed with a thing on string she can whirl it about annoying enemies from a distance.The big sod is called Benkei and he uses a big log to batter enemies, he doesn't like to combo much but his powerful attacks are useful for clearing rocks out of the way. And finally, there's Lord Busen who has a spear. Brilliant...

The Sixaxis pad comes into play though! You can use it to dodge out of the way of enemy attacks when you jiggle it, or just use the right analogue stick like any normal person would. One thing that piqued our interest while playing though was the Kamui attack. Fill up the gauge and when you unleash this on enemies you get to play a little quick-time event, press the buttons on screen and watch in awe as your character warps to different enemies and cuts them down.

Genji does of course look quite nice with its detailed graphics, but it would have been nice to see a bit more of them. Unfortunately the camera is fixed so you can't whirl it about or adjust it and we imagine this will get a bit annoying in the later levels.So far *Genji* is looking like it will be average at best, and definitely ignored when the far superior *Heavenly Sword* comes out.

anticipation

60%

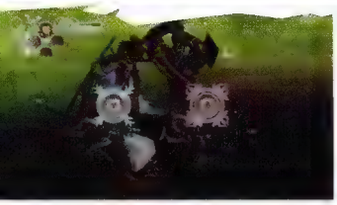
Can you tell we're not looking forward to *Genji*? It's just not fun to play and feels distinctly last gen. Not sure about all the English voice acting either.

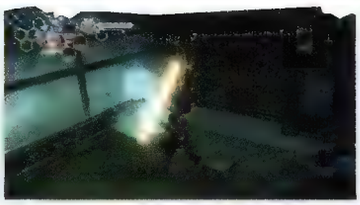
next IN LINE KICKING AND SCREAMING

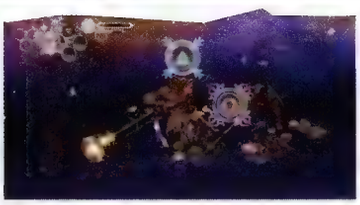
Don't get in too close with Shizuka she's better at attacking from a distance, so dash back a bit with the right analogue stick.

Then you can use her grappling hook to stun enemies and drag them closer to you.

Which seems like the wrong thing to do because she's still rubbish at close combat. Best start jumping out of the way.

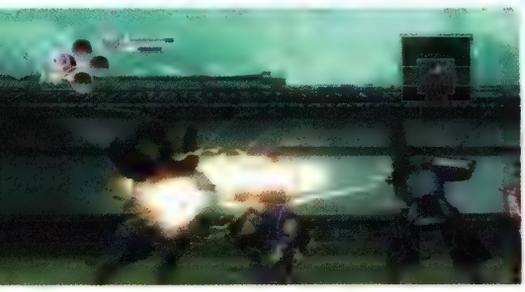






next-GEN MOMENT

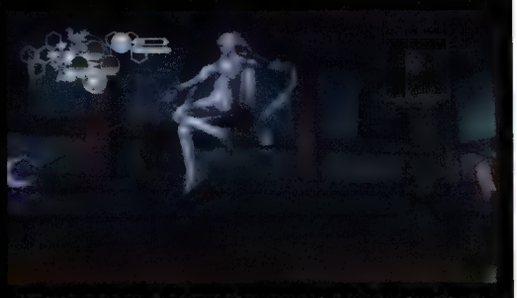
Umm... is there a next-gen moment in *Genji*? We looked really hard and couldn't seem to find anything. Okay, so it does look quite pretty we'll give it that, but as far as the gameplay and camera angles go this isn't anything new or special.



next IN LINE

She does like to jump around quite a bit, even though she's supposed to fight like she's dancing. It's like no dance we've ever seen.

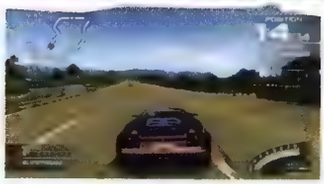
If the enemy is quite large then Shizuka flies through the air towards them. You can dish out a few punches and kicks on your way.

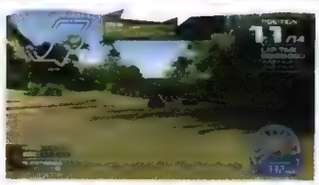


And then go for a bit more jumping about. You don't have to jump this much really. But it eases the boredom.

next-GEN MOMENT

Nothing screams next-generation quite like playing against 13 other racers from around the world and kicking ass. This frenetic multiplayer experience is the very heart and soul of *Ridge Racer 7* as the status bar on the menu screen testifies. You'll be constantly updated on your race wins, battle points and reputation.



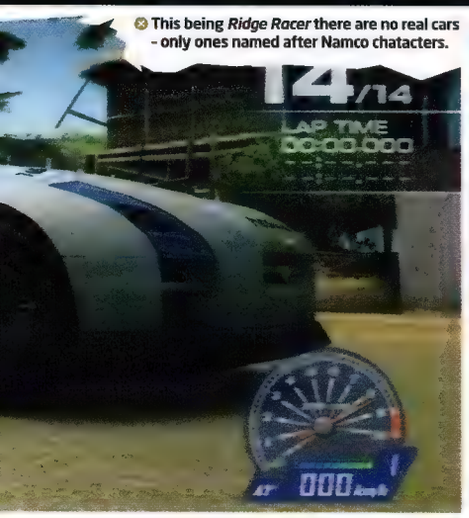


next IN LINE KEEP ON TRACK

A little light revving should get us off to a good start, we need to try to hit that racing line as quickly as possible otherwise we'll never make it up the ranks quickly enough.

Now we're in behind the pack we can start slipstreaming and climb a little further forward. Got to get those Long drifts in while the pressure's off for Nitro pleasure.

We're a third round the first lap and we're still in 12th. That's not good. We need to be in at least 8th by the end of this lap to make an impact on the leaders.



This being *Ridge Racer* there are no real cars - only ones named after Namco chatacters.

Ridge Racer 7

We take the wheel of this perennial PlayStation launch title

PS3 LAUNCH GAME

Publisher//Sony **Developer**//Namco **Genre**//Racing **Players**//1-2 (2-14 Online) **Website**//www.namcobandaigames.com **Release Date**//March

LIKE winter must follow autumn and the sun must set in the west, so *Ridge Racer* must be a launch title on any Sony console. This much we knew. What we weren't so certain of was how *Ridge Racer 7*, the latest iteration of this long-running racing series, would handle on the PS3. Would stepping into the unknown arena of next-gen gaming mean any kind of departure for this most accessible of driving titles? Could we expect an innovative control set-up? How would *RR7* define itself in this new gaming era?

Having got our hands on the latest build of the game from Japan we've tried to find the answers to these questions. Briefly, we have come to the conclusion that they consist of: no, no, and by staying the same. In a more lengthy form, *Ridge Racer 7* is neither a departure nor even much of an evolution of the series. It's simply a continuation of the game that we know and love that's both as accessible and addictive as it has always been.

After successfully navigating our way through the Japanese menus, we went straight for Arcade mode. From the dozen or so cars we had available to us the swifter, dynamic range of vehicles were easily the best choice. Their drifting ability and control were generally better, but their acceleration really set them apart from the pack. We were still a bit rusty as we began and struggled to get out of the bottom four or five places in our early races. However, the recovery speed of the dynamic cars really helped us recuperate from our all-too-frequent lapses in control. As we played on, things began to swing in our favour.

One key aspect of this change of fortunes was due to mastering the new drafting ability. Once we began to see the benefit of lining ourselves up in someone's slipstream, races started to take on an entirely different flavour. *Ridge Racer 7* continues the tradition of punishing those who fail to climb up the ranks at a sufficient speed. If you're not in the top eight after the first lap, you can practically give up on finishing with the leading pack. But if you can duck, draft and dodge your way through the traffic in the early stages then pole position is as good as yours.

RR7 continues to be all about the drifting and while games such as *Need For Speed* have only recently taken to such antics, *Ridge Racer* is the true home of sideways driving. If you want the Nitro meter to increase and give you that all-important advantage in the straights, then mastery of the rear-end slide is as essential as ever. The sensitivity of the analogue control was something that took repeated plays to acquaint ourselves with, but after only 30 minutes we were drifting effortlessly and gracefully. We're looking forward to getting our hands on some more tracks and the rest of the cars. More importantly, we're ready for some head-to-head competition. What's *Ridge Racer* without multiplayer after all? Bring on the world.

anticipation

As the bestselling launch title in Japan, *Ridge Racer 7* is certainly a step up from previous games graphically and it's also very accessible; however, it doesn't venture far from familiar ground.

next IN LINE

Oh, that sweet horizontal driving, nothing can beat it for pure *Ridge Racing* pleasure. We're still well behind the pack though as the red dot indicates.

The Nitrous is pretty handy when once you've built up a head of steam, but less effective at anything below full throttle. Clearly we haven't done that well.

The trailing pack are back in sight, but with only a few hundred yards left there's no chance of finishing anything higher than 11th now. For shame...

Virtua Fighter 5

Simply put, the world's greatest fighting game, exclusively on PS3

PS3 **Publisher**//Sega **Developer**//Sega AM2 **Genre**//Beat-'em-up **Players**//1-2 **Website**//www.virtuafighter.jp **Release Date**//2007

WHEN Sega came down to the office with *Virtua Fighter 5* a huge crowd tried to cram into the games room. There were people on the sofa, all the extra chairs were taken up, more people lined the walls and whenever anyone else tried to get into the room, the person in front of the door got jammed in the back by the door handle. But then *Virtua Fighter 5* was always going to attract a crowd. It looks absolutely stunning and since the series has the reputation of being the best beat-'em-up on whatever console it's released on, everybody had to have a go.

Then the mashing commenced and reminded everyone that they were rubbish at *Virtua Fighter*. Those poor virgin Triangle buttons on our new Sixaxis pads didn't know what hit them. It was thumbs of course, but these were some of the fastest thumbs in the gaming magazine business hammering away, trying to get moves out before their opponent's equally fast thumbs did the same. Of course, this is not how you're supposed to play *Virtua Fighter* at all. This game requires timing, knowledge of combos and attacks; you also need an idea of what to do when someone starts using Crouching Punch all the time and perhaps some sense of humility upon the realisation that all you've done is waggle your thumb over the D-pad and mash on all the face buttons.

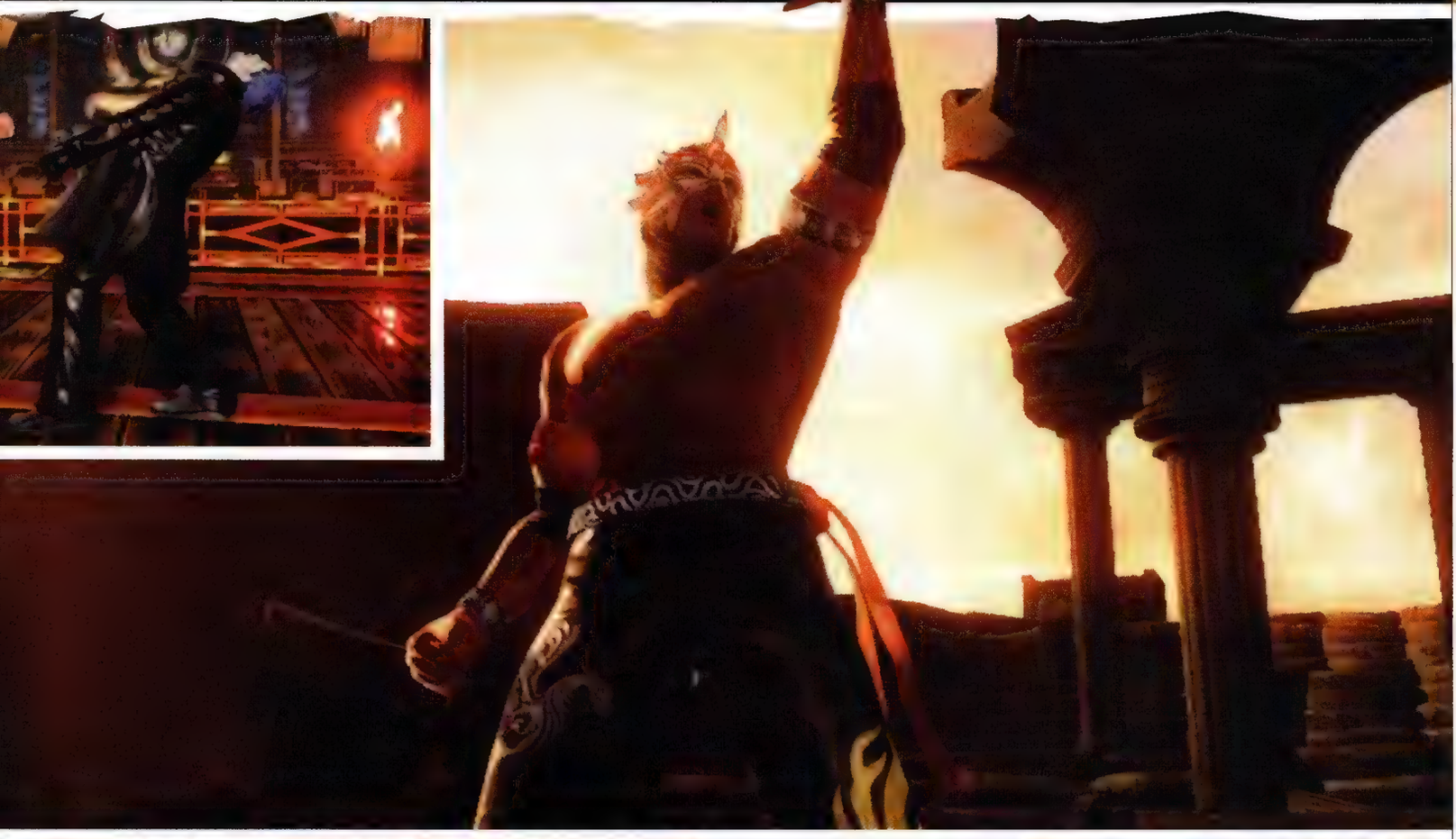
Eventually nearly everyone left the games room after thoroughly embarrassing themselves, with the exception of one person who for some reason thought he was great as a result of mashing his way to a false victory, then walked off seemingly psyched about his *VF* 'skills'. The remaining three got to spend a bit more time checking out the game and its characters. This group included Ryan King from X360 magazine who has his own arcade sticks, regularly plays *VF4 Evolution*, attends beat-'em-up comps in London and is pretty much champion at every fighting game ever; Jude Salmon from Play magazine who also owns a few arcade sticks, plays *VF4 Evolution* a bit but not to any competitive level and Tim Empey also from Play mag who played *VF4* (not *Evolution*) for about a month, on a pad, and doesn't even like it much because there are

next IN LINE MAD FIGHTING SKILLS

This is the character select screen, highlight one of the characters and up comes a rather fascinating picture of their face. Don't pick Akira, you'll never be able to use him properly.

Pick Eileen because she's new and start fooling around pressing all the button combos and directions you can think of. Pressing △ makes her punch! Like this. In your face Pai!

Being an exponent of Monkey Kung Fu, Eileen has some funny-looking moves, but they're useful for avoiding grabs and throws and can even put opponents off because they're laughing at you.



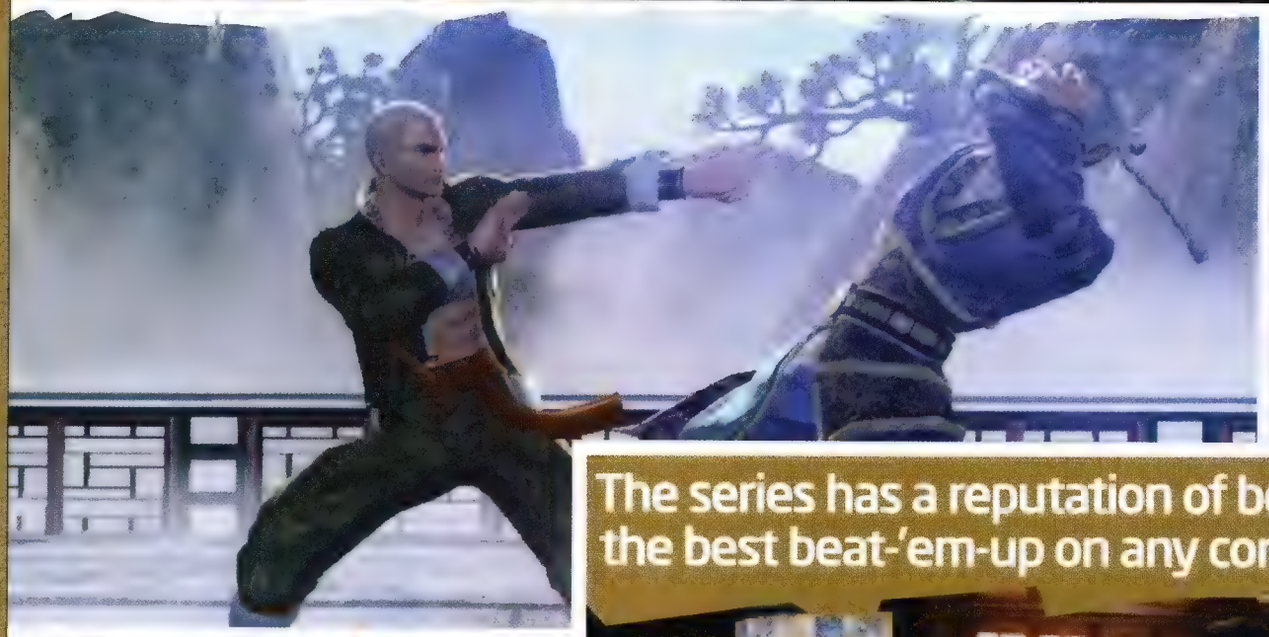
Eileen and El Blaze are two new characters for *VF5*. We're all about Eileen for now.

next IN LINE

Ha ha ha! Eileen's riding Pai like a donkey. Donkey Kung Fu! She doesn't have any multipart throws so just remember to use ↑ and punch to do her jumping ground attack afterwards.

Moves that stagger the opponent are very useful and can open them up for a right beating. You just have to memorise the moves and decide which work best for your fighting style.

Or just mash like a idiot and get kicked in the face. Then if you win, shout something like "Mashed potatoes bitch!" that confirms to everyone that you're a noob and rubbish at games.



The series has a reputation of being the best beat-'em-up on any console

Jeffry takes one to his massive gut, so it probably didn't hurt much.

next-GEN MOMENT

On this stage the ground is covered in water. While it doesn't affect the footing of the characters it does make some really nice splashes when someone gets rammed to the floor. But even more amazing than that is the fact the characters' clothes actually get visibly wet and soggy as the match progresses.

Shun is still tricky to use, we just like making him drink over and over.

no explosions when characters hit each other. So there were players with varying degrees of skill from good to near non-existent.

We didn't have time to go through the moves list and learn all of El Blaze's and Eileen's attacks and stances, or find out what new moves the returning characters have; however, we did get a good workout with everybody before Sega ejected the disc out of the PS3 and took it home, which we thought was just mean!

Eileen quickly became a favourite because she's so fast, even outpacing Pai in some aspects. She uses Monkey Kung Fu and although she looks kind of funny when her stranger attacks come out, she did prove to be very effective at dashing in and starting a juggle combo. Amidst of all her monkeying around, she has some very cool attacks; in particular, the weird double shoulder launcher or the throw where she jumps onto the shoulders of her opponent and slaps them round the head a few times – it's incredibly hilarious when this is done on the bigger characters like Jeffry and Wolf.

As you probably know, El Blaze uses a Luche Libre-style of wrestling, so he spins around the head of his opponent before taking them down with a leg lock. He even has a very complicated throw that involves him wrapping himself around the competitor several times and then using a modified Hurricanrana. Interestingly, another of El Blaze's moves resembles Dragon Punch from *Street Fighter* – as he crouches down he performs a jumping uppercut. In fact, it also bears similarities to Kazuya from *Tekken*'s Dragon Uppercut as he can combo it into a mid-air kick. El Blaze is funny too – while most characters have quite static stances where they just shift their feet and arms to gain access to more moves, Blaze actually starts running and can even jump over a downed opponent before running back with a drop kick to the face or the shins. Unfortunately, we couldn't quite get this to work and most of the time his running and leaping about was easily stopped with a simple punch to the gob.

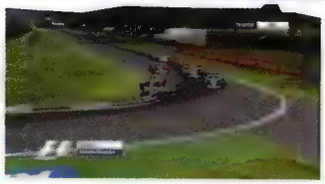
All *VF* games have a steep learning curve, so it's best to start out with an easier-to-use character such as Jacky who can take a punch to the face and automatically parry it. The fact we were using a pad didn't really help either. The problems with the Dual Shock's D-pad and the difficulty it has performing diagonal directions are still there on the Sixaxis, but add to that the positioning of the face buttons, you'll either adopt a weird crab-like finger pose above them or use the shoulder buttons. These are automatically assigned thankfully, but with P+K+G and K+G assigned to the new levers on L2 and R2 it becomes even more hit and mostly miss as to whether you've used them at the right time to connect properly.

Anyone who's ever played a fighting game as it should be played knows that a pad is not the successful way to play it – you really need an arcade stick to play it to its full extent. The good news is that Sega is producing its own line of sticks specifically for *Virtua Fighter 5* on the PS3. However, the bad news is that these won't be available in Europe, possibly ever. Which could mean a whole lot of expensive importing from Japan, unless Sony can be convinced otherwise. To do this there will need to be a lot of *VF5* games sold over here; but considering the time and patience it takes to play *VF5* properly, chances are slim. Considering it looks so damn fine, plays amazingly well and is the most balanced fighting game ever though, it just might get enough people playing it for this to happen. As such we can't wait for this to come out and maybe Sega will be kind enough to send some sticks over with it. And then Ryan can beat everyone up again. Arse!

95%

anticipation

Virtua Fighter 5 is by far the best beat-'em-up series. Not only does it look great, it's also much more balanced than *Tekken*. It even uses real martial arts moves.



next-GEN MOMENT

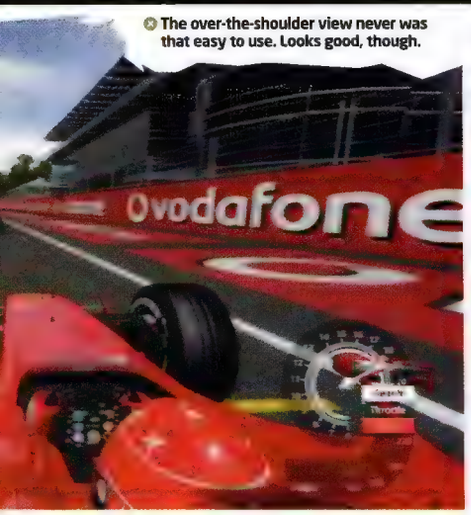
There's not one single instance that clarifies this version of *F1* as a next-gen experience, indeed we're not sure that it warrants the (now rather overused) term 'next-gen'. However, there are some touches that make *Championship Edition* special in terms of a complete racer. The first being the incomparable speed and the accompanying rumble effect that seems to react to every tiny bump in the road.

next IN LINE RACING TOWARD THE FINISH LINE

We're on the grid, watching as the lights come into view. We marvel at how the resilient V8 doesn't go 'pop' even after ten seconds of massive over-revving.

Wait for the lights to go out and slam into gear. It's go, go, go, and as your eyes leap about the screen watching other cars, our position and your rev-o-meter or whatever it's called.

Shifting up through the gears and leaping places by the second, our aggressive attitude to racing wins us a position near the front of the pack. We can taste the champers already.



The over-the-shoulder view never was that easy to use. Looks good, though.

Formula One Championship Edition

Looks like the magic formula's working

PS3 **Publisher**//Sony **Developer**//Liverpool Studio **Genre**//Racing **Players**//1-16 **Website**//www.playstation-f1.com **Release Date**//2007

FORMULA One has never been a massive favourite around the office. Despite the actual sport being filled with excitement and glamour, Sony has persistently been caught between the two stools of realism and arcade racing. Suffer no delusions: despite the hype, *Gran Turismo* this is not. What it is, however, is the most exciting F1 title we've played in years and it looks delicious to boot.

Starting with the visuals then, and the simple, stunning, overawing beauty is something not to be dismissed. Take the rain – it's absolutely wonderful to see it react to the speed of your motor, sliding across your visor as you investigate the top end of you gearbox. However, at the end of the day, *Formula One* is a relatively basic game, and one with little variation, allowing Sony to really go to town with the visuals.

But then that doesn't detract from the slightly loose physics. Sure, the sense of speed is immense, and with all the neat graphical touches, the severe velocities are heightened further, but much of the time your V8, 2.4, normally aspirated monsters feels blu-tacked to the road. It seems doubtful to us that this issue, small as it is, will be addressed before release.

That aside, *Formula One* has managed to up our level of interest quite significantly with some genuinely exciting races. The code we had gave us access to a majority of the race options that catered for all levels of skill from the novice, driving with every aid possible, to the veteran, using manual gears, removing all but the most essential aids, and adding heavy rain just for the hell of it. The former, with all the aids included is a pointless exercise requiring little more than pushing forward, while the latter demands your unremitting concentration from start to finish. Drop your attention for a second and you're likely to end up giving one of your fellow racers a touch of whiplash or careering into a rather deceptively named safety barrier.

That, for us at least, is the real joy of *Formula One Championship Edition*. Each of us has found a level they're happy with and we've been surprised with the fun we've had tearing around the two courses we've had access to. Sure, the overall feel isn't quite as true-to-life as we would have expected, and despite some nice damage modelling and particle physics, the level of realism is lacking. If anything this should widen the appeal of a franchise that has always been the preserve of the hardcore racing fans without alienating them.

Formula One needs shouting about, as it's as fun a racer as you'll find on the PS3. Along with *Ridge Racer 7* and *MotorStorm*, the PS3 is pretty much covered in terms of racing titles; the choice on launch day isn't something to be made on quality, as each is as good as the other. However, what we would say is that given the narrowness of the franchise, *Championship Edition* has taken an unexpected leap in excitement in the move to next-gen power, and that's a nice thing to see.

anticipation

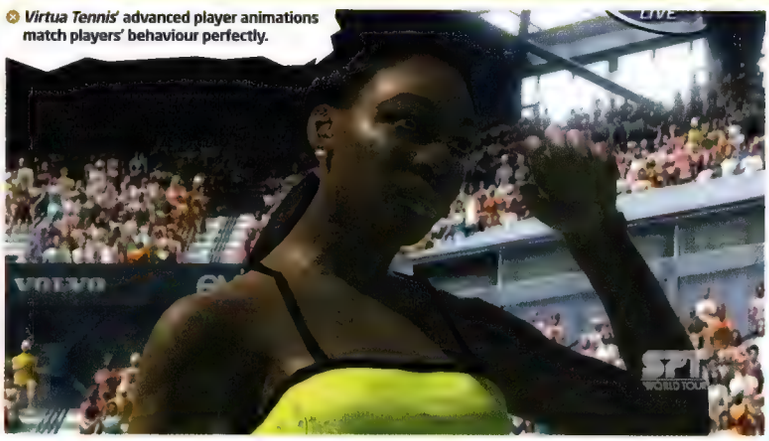
Some ever-so-slightly lazy physics, but what we've played so far is showing us that *Formula One Championship Edition* can be a lot more exciting than any previous title in the franchise.

next IN LINE

We weave in and out of the other motorists with careless abandon, tickling their exhausts with our nose cone. As long as no one brakes coming into this corner, we'll be fine.

We 'll take a shortcut. Cutting two corners, we're well chuffed that we're the only ones that noticed it. It'll get us a penalty later on, but we reckon it's worth it. No guts, no glory.

All we need to do is relax and we've got this victory in the bag. Unfortunately, we need to end this insert with a little closure, so we ram our car purposefully into the wall for your delight.



Virtua Tennis' advanced player animations match players' behaviour perfectly.

next IN LINE KILLER RETURNS

The classic return, suitable for hard-hitters such as Roddick: step in a little from the baseline, moving into the ball as the serve is delivered, and thump it back down the line.

After a few returns down the line, throw in a cross-court slice. Chances are your opponent will be rushing to cover the tramline, leaving him hopelessly stranded.

Try slinking right back from a weak serve when at the bottom of the screen, throwing in a top-spin cross-courter and enjoy as your opponent becomes barely visible at the top of the screen.

Virtua Tennis 3

Are you being served?

PS3 **Publisher**//Sega **Developer**//AM2 **Genre**//Sports **Players**//1-4
Website// www.sega-europe.com **Release Date**//March

LAUNCH GAME

IT'S not much fun playing a game in a room a full of journalists waiting for you to make a fool of yourself. We've seen people turn and run when the Sixaxis arrived in their hands for their first stab at *Resistance* or *MotorStorm.* This isn't a problem for us, of course, as we're right at the top of the gaming ladder, but for others the prospect of getting to grips with tilt-controlling and myriad button commands can be a daunting prospect. Telling, then, that when *Virtua Tennis 3* arrived in the office it pulled in a crowd of people eager to get their hands on the controller. *Virtua Tennis* is beautifully simple. In fact it's pretty hard to appear too incompetent once you've been given the instruction 'press ⊗'. There is hardly a game that more perfectly translates a sport into shiny disc form. As such, anybody could play the game facing a computer opponent without fear of humiliation.

With *Virtua Tennis* it is only when facing a seasoned pro that you start to understand just how much there is to master. After five minutes of being second-guessed and manoeuvred again and again into no-man's land you realise that this game is simple, but most definitely not simplistic.

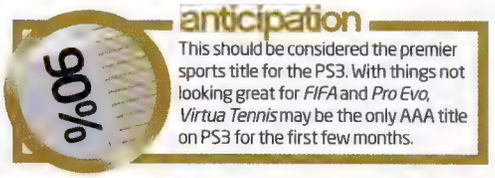
And *Virtua Tennis 3* – well, it's shinier. Shinier, with balls on it. It's hard to see what could have been done to improve the gameplay and from our limited experience with the title, the game mechanics don't appear to have been touched. Facing a barely competent Tim Henman, our invincible titan Federer moved about the court like a god, rendering the use of a lob or a slice mere showmanship. As always with *Virtua Tennis*, it just felt so right. While it was almost difficult to lose a point to the hapless computer, you could immediately feel what it is that makes *Virtua Tennis* such a perfect game. Through such simple mechanics a game underpinned by timing, angles and patterns emerges. It is all about negotiating your way around the court combining mathematical precision with a level of tactical thought that is absent from most sport games, where move-sets very often emerge guaranteeing a goal or point. So we strolled through our turn at the helm, knocking back blistering returns and scintillating aces and were left to study what's really changed: the graphics! It looks better. Hard as this might be to believe, *Virtua Tennis 3* features such innovations as improved player likenesses, more textured clay and a beautifully accurate bouncing yellow ball. We accept that this may sound less exciting than our exclamation mark would imply, but, the truth is, when a game is this intuitive these changes are significant. It feels perfect and now it's getting pretty close to mimicking exactly what you see of Wimbledon or the Roland Garros Tournament on your television screens.

In a world with the out-of-your-hands randomness of *Pro Evo* and the soft-spots of *FIFA*, *Virtua Tennis* is a shining light. Here is a sports game that really gets it right. When March comes we will be putting our *Virtua Tennis 2* to the side, loading up *Virtua Tennis 3*, racing to select Federer and commenting 'it looks better' without a hint of cynicism.

Here's Ms. Sharapova psyching herself up for the match - she's hardcore!

next-GEN MOMENT

With the possibility of free online multiplayer, *VT3* will become more exciting tactically than ever before. Unlike real-world opponents who can work out your patterns of play, online ones will be totally unprepared for the kind of mental warfare you're ready to unleash. Mental warfare such as calling them 'gay'. Hehe! Americans hate that.



anticipation

This should be considered the premier sports title for the PS3. With things not looking great for *FIFA* and *Pro Evo*, *Virtua Tennis* may be the only AAA title on PS3 for the first few months.

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PS3 Publisher [illegible] Developer [illegible] Genre//RPG Players//1
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The beginning of a whole new era

Final Fantasy XIII

WITHOUT a doubt *Final Fantasy* is the greatest RPG series ever. No other series of games has made you feel so involved with the characters and their missions to save the worlds. No other series has had so many standout moments that have either shocked or made you feel kind of fuzzy. And no other series has done more for the RPG genre than *Final Fantasy*.

Everyone has their favourite *Final Fantasy* and each game has at least one moment or twist in the story that marks them out from the usual stat-raising, random-battling, by-the-numbers RPGs. Polom and Parom's incredible self-sacrifice in *Final Fantasy IV*, Kefka poisoning Doma Castle's water supply in *VI*, Squall saving Rinoa from the depths of space in *VIII*, the truth about Tidus' father in *X* and of course the most shocking event in RPG history, the death of Aeris Gainsborough in *VII* are just some of the surprising events that have helped secure *Final Fantasy* a place in the hearts of RPG fans all over the world.

Final Fantasy XIII will be coming exclusively to the PS3, which is great news for fans of the genre who have been waiting patiently for the first proper next-gen RPG. The Xbox 360 still hasn't got a decent one and since *FFXIII* won't be ported over, it might not ever get a game containing interesting characters – each with their own complex back stories – complete with a plot that blows you away. But the Playstation 3 will. However, the only problem is the length of time it's going to take to come out over here.

Take *Final Fantasy XII* for example; it came out in March this year in Japan, but won't be released in PAL territories until February next year – almost 12 months later. Translation and localisation takes its toll on our gaming again, but then *XII* did only come out in the US in October. However, the PS3 will be Region Free, so it will be interesting to see if these delay times will change and whether or not we will have the pleasure of a worldwide simultaneous release of *FFXIII*. It's unlikely, but at least we can import the American version while the rest of Europe will have to wait for the game to be translated into different languages.

It's also disappointing to report that *Final Fantasy XIII* is nowhere near completion. Work started on the project three years ago and was originally planned for release on the PlayStation 2. That has all been scrapped now and unfortunately at the moment, *XIII* is still very much a 'work in progress'. In addition to that, as most of the time has been spent getting the graphics engine and the gameplay worked out, there hasn't been a great deal revealed about the plot. In fact, the first playable demo of the game hasn't even been made yet; however, rumours do suggest that one will make an appearance at next year's E3. All this waiting is excruciating.

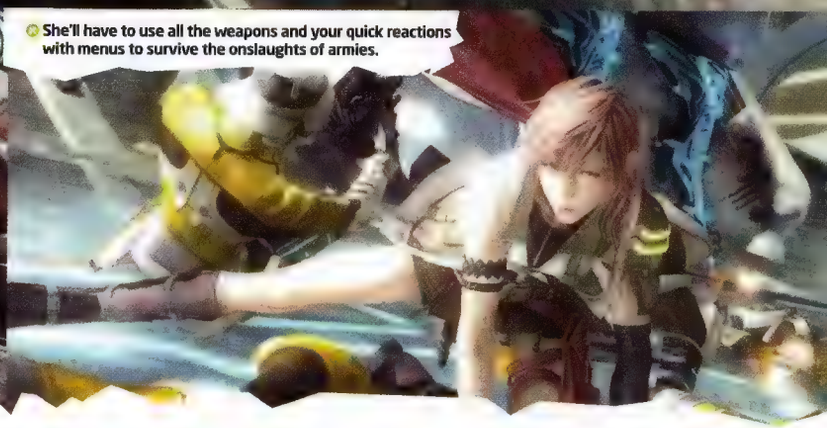
That's the bad news out of the way though, all the rest is good news – bloody brilliant news really. First of all, there's not just *FFXIII* to play, there is also the matter of *Versus XIII* and the mobile phone game called *Agito XIII*. All three games are coming under the series title *Fabula Nova Crystallis* or *'The New Tale Of The Crystal'* and are based on the same mythos of crystals that can shape the future. Square Enix president Yoichi Wada has likened the series to *Star Wars* and has suggested that it could be expanded on and even span a decade of more games, films, books and comics. It also bears similarities to Square's *Compilation Of Final Fantasy VII* as that now has six games, two films (*Advent Children* and *Last Order*) and two books (*On The Way To A Smile* and *Maiden Who Travels The Planet*). Curiously, Square called the *VII Compilation* a "50 billion Yen project" but is already calling *Fabula Nova Crystallis* a "100 billion Yen project". Needless to say, there will be some interesting and unusual happenings in this new series.

All three games are being developed in conjunction with each other but they will be totally separate stories with different characters. However, it's the two PS3 games that are of most interest as even though they share the same universe and

No other series has done more for the RPG genre than Final Fantasy

Final Fantasy XIII

The main character from *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* can telekinetically control a vast armoury of weapons.



She'll have to use all the weapons and your quick reactions with menus to survive the onslaughts of armies.

The one that got it wrong

The MMORPG that no one really likes

Final Fantasy XI piqued many fans' interest for being the first massively multiplayer online RPG in the series. Lots of people got it for their PS2s, PCs and Xbox 360s and looked forward to a lengthy stay in the world of Vana'diel. Then they all found out that levelling up involved killing hundreds and hundreds of bees and other small, insignificant creatures just to get to a decent level before they could start questing properly. It turned quite a few people off it, as did the incredibly long installation time it takes before you even get to the bees.

It had quite a boom when it was first released in Japan, and then again when it was released in the West, but only those with the strongest of wills and perhaps not much else better to do have really got anything out of it. Just be glad *XIII* will be nothing like this.

mythos, they aren't all that related. In fact, they're even seen as being polar opposites and this is reflected in their base colours. The numbered *Final Fantasy*s are always based on the colour white – this is particularly evident on the cover art of the game box – but for *Versus XIII*, Square Enix is reversing this and basing it on the colour black. Square also promises *Versus* to have a much darker plot with 'pain' as an overriding theme. As fans of the darker moments in *Kingdom Hearts II*, we can't wait to get all 'emo' with *Versus XIII*. It's set in a strange time when modern weapons such as guns and rifles are used alongside medieval weapons and armour; in addition to that, the character in the screenshots has to protect the crystals on his world once again from marauding forces.

Back to the lighter side of the new *Final Fantasy* though, and the main numbered game is looking absolutely fantastic. Square Enix has developed its own graphics engine in order to make the most of the PS3's processing power. The White Engine uses four of the six synergistic processing elements in the Cell processor that results in CGI quality in-game graphics. If you've played any of the *Final Fantasy* games on the PSone or PS2 then you'll know how jarring and somewhat disappointing it can be when you're returned to the angular in-game graphics, especially after being treated to an amazing cut-scene with lifelike characters and incredible animation. Thankfully, we can say goodbye to that. One of the things the White Engine has been designed to do is seamlessly blend the cut-scenes with the in-game graphics. So this means that when the scene ends you will regain control of the character, but there won't be much of a difference between what you were watching and what you are playing. It could also see the end of the swirling screen effects when a battle starts as well. In most *Final Fantasy* games, when a random battle begins the screen will either blur or, in some games, crack and break away as the battle loads. The characters are then all lined up and ready for your commands. This happens in most of the games bar *FFXI* and *XII* – it made sense in *XI* because of its MMORPG status – however, it really was quite a departure in *XII* not to have a separate battle screen for each fight. Instead your party's characters will attack the nearest enemy on screen while you control one character and make important decisions from the menu. When a fight ends, the experience points and Gil are toted up, but

this isn't done on another screen, instead it's done while you're running to the next enemy. This helped change the flow of the game and it's something that will be implemented in *XIII*. It also lessens the feeling of uncontrollable random battles and will make progressing through the locations a lot easier because you don't have to stop and fend off some weak monsters when you're really close to a chest or item.

Another attraction to *Final Fantasy XIII* is the battles themselves and, more specifically, how they will work. You've seen *Final Fantasy: Advent Children*, right? You may have noticed how excellently the fight scenes in that were choreographed and how Cloud and Tifa were able to utilise so many different weapons and fighting styles, well *Final Fantasy XIII* is aiming for something similar to that. Director of *Final Fantasy XIII*, Motomu Toriyama has stated that: "*FFXIII* attempts to see how far it's possible to make *FFVII: Advent Children*'s battles into a game. *FFVII: Advent Children* is a video production, and it showed us battles that have not been achievable in *FF* so far. With *FFXIII*, we're focusing on how far we can realise the video."

In the trailer you can see how this is going to work. Along the bottom of the screen there

Other Fantasies

The landmark entries of the franchise leading up to the ultimate Fantasy

Since its conception back in 1987, the *Final Fantasy* series has gone from strength to strength. Rather than going through each game in turn ,here are some of the standout games (and film) in the series.

Final Fantasy VII *(PSone 1997)*

After the success of the NES and SNES games this was the big one. It not only opened up the *Final Fantasy* series to the West but also gave the RPG genre a massive boost due to its 3D graphics and intense story. Ask any RPG fan what their favourite is and they'll usually say *Final Fantasy VII*.

Final Fantasy VII: Dirge Of Cerberus *(PS2 2006)*

Another sequel to *Final Fantasy VII* sees Vincent Valentine (one of the playable characters in *FFVII*) turn his back on turn-based battles and resort to a *Resident Evil 4* style third-person shooter. It's not a great game but it does show that people will buy practically anything associated with *FFVII*, which just proves the draw of the series.

Kingdom Hearts I & II *(PS2 2002, 2005)*

While they're not considered as part of the actual *Final Fantasy* series, *Kingdom Hearts I* and *II* perfectly blend the worlds of Disney and *Final Fantasy* to create an incredibly heart-warming adventure. The best worlds in both *Kingdom Hearts* feature characters from *Final Fantasy VII, VIII, IX* and *X* and are the perfect antidote for when the Disney influences become too sweet and twee.

Final Fantasy III *(Famicom 1990, NDS 2006)*

Although it was never released in the US or Europe this *Final Fantasy* saw the first inclusion of the Job system where the characters could learn different skills depending on their role. This system returned in later *FF* games having proved popular with fans. An updated version has been released in Japan and the US for the Nintendo DS system.

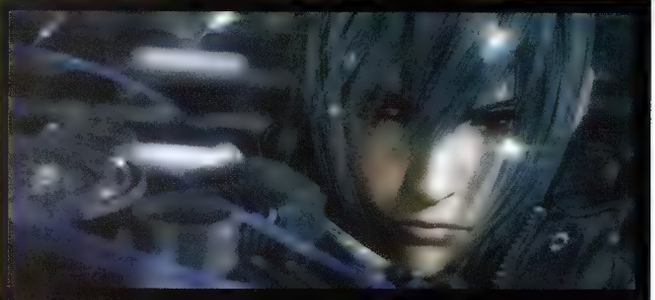
Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children *(Cinemas 2005)*

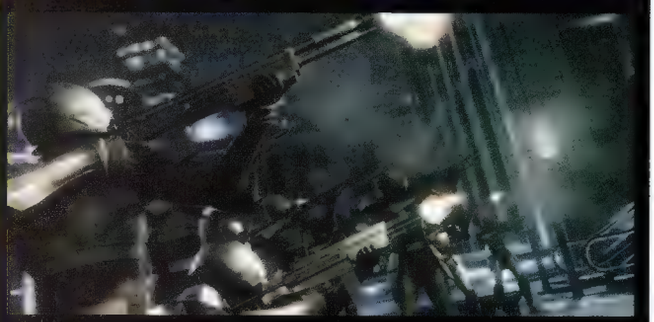
Square tried to release a *Final Fantasy* film before, but *Spirits Within* bombed with both fans and critics finding it confusing and not really anything to do with the games. *Advent Children* was what the fans wanted and Square Enix delivered. Taking place after the events of *FFVII*, it reunited the much-loved heroes and placed them in new peril.

Final Fantasy X-2 *(PS2 2003)*

This was the first direct sequel to a *Final Fantasy* game. Usually each *Fantasy* takes place in a different world with a different cast and a different story. However, here you were able to take Yuna, Rikku and new friend Paine all over Spira again, tying up some loose ends from the first game and eventually reuniting Yuna with someone very special. *X-2* divides opinion of fans to this day.

Square Enix has developed its own graphics engine in order to make the most of the PS3's processing power





Final Fantasy Vs Final Fantasy

Half a world away trouble is brewing...

Final Fantasy XIII is being spread out over three different games - okay so one's on a mobile phone and probably won't be very grand - unlike the proper game and this: *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*, but there are three games nonetheless. *Versus* isn't a direct sequel and is a completely independent story that will take place on a different world and have different characters to play as and fight against. What is interesting is that the game is being directed by Tetsuya Nomura whose most recent work includes *Kingdom Hearts II*. We can even draw a slight parallel between the blades swirling around the main character's body in one of the released screenshots and the Final Form that Sora uses in *Kingdom Hearts II* that, when activated, sees two Keyblades circle him, firing off to attack enemies before returning. It has been suggested that the main character is the last heir to the ruling dynasty of this world and is the protector of mysterious crystals. Meanwhile, a bloody coup is being put in action. Hopefully we'll have two *Final Fantasy XIII* games realised in the same year - that would be amazing.

are the commands that have already been selected from the menu on the left, and as each action is carried out – in incredible style we might add – they disappear from the bar at the bottom. It really is the successor to the Active Time Battle system that has been used in nearly every *Final Fantasy* game; however, rather than almost calmly flicking through the menus you will have to do it pretty quickly so as not to miss your attacking point. To help with this though, and keeping in line with the futuristic feel of *XIII*, the heroine has something Square is calling a Gravity Bomb. It's based around the Gravity spell that you get in many other *FF* games, but rather than being a spell it is a gadget. With it the heroine can not only attach herself to practically any surface by manipulating the gravity, she can also slow down time for those around her, and this is when you'll be able to select your next attacks to unleash once the effect of the Gravity Bomb has stopped. We're guessing that all the other traditional spells – fire, lightning, ice and so on – will be replaced by other items, possibly powered by the mysterious crystals that seem so popular in this game. However, it could be that the Bomb needs time to charge so you'll have to choose your attacks wisely in order to not let the enemies get too much of a chance to fight back.

The heroine in *Final Fantasy* already has an interesting arsenal with the Gravity Bomb and other attacks at her disposal but she also has one more awesome trick up her sleeve: a transforming gun/sword. When you see this thing in action it's amazing. One moment she's blasting all those around her with deadly accuracy and the next, parts of the gun extend and reposition themselves until she's standing there wielding a rather impressive sword that she can use to cut through enemies. You can see in one of the screenshots she can even pierce monsters' skulls with it. The best thing about this though, is that it opens up her attacks to include some special combos and quite possibly, with further upgrades, she'll be able to fashion a proper gun blade a bit like Squall's in *Final Fantasy VIII*. There was a lot of gun modification going on in *k* so we expect there to be something along the same lines in *XIII*, only with the added advantage of modifying the sword as well.

So far the heroine is the only character who has been revealed, but Square has promised that there will be times when she won't just be fighting her own, and that other party members will become available. This means that eventually the party will be able to make special combo attacks and even use the environment as part of their attacks. It does sound quite complex considering the nature of the battles, but we will reserve judgement until we have seen it with our own eyes.

You will have noticed the futuristic feel of *Final Fantasy XIII* too, Square has said that this *Final Fantasy* will be set in a much more technological-based time than any previous games, even *VII* and *VIII*. The cities are enormous in *Final Fantasy XIII* and the monorail train we see at the start of the trailer must circle the whole planet. Perhaps there won't even be a need for the usual airship normally used to get around in *Final Fantasy* games and everything will be connected by teleporters instead.

Normal attacks can take out regular enemies; however, for more damage it's best to try and choose an opposing elemental attack.

With attacks coming from all sides and probably above and below, there has to be a way of knocking enemies into each other.

Whatever the case, *Final Fantasy XIII* has so many more secrets to let out yet. It's just such a shame that we won't be playing this game until the end of next year or, even worse, the beginning of 2008. There has to be something to do to help pass the time until then... well there is always *Final Fantasy XII*. We could also spend time getting the secret ending on *Kingdom Hearts II*, that does take quite a while. We'll probably just end up playing through *Dirge Of Cerberus* again, or we might try to find a copy of *Ehrgeiz: God Bless The Ring* on the PSone. Well at least it will be something to do in the meantime.

%complete

10 | 20 | 30

The one you'll never play

Final Fantasy XIII on a phone

Alongside *Final Fantasy XIII* and *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* is *Final Fantasy Agito XIII* (can we get another *Final Fantasy XIII* in this sentence? Yes we can!). It is said to be an online RPG, though not in the Massively Multiplayer style of things, and will make use of the functions of a mobile phone... in some manner. Little is known about it, even though it was announced back at this year's E3, but it is set in a school and you can choose from a variety of job titles, such as those in the art work below. However, since it will be a Japanese mobile phone game, the chances of you ever playing it are incredibly slim.

next[3]hype

PS3 Developer //Midway Chicago Genre//Action Players//1
Release Date//March 2007

Few have come close to capturing the insanely ballistic delight of early Woo

It's too Woo for school

Stranglehold

THERE'S a scene towards the end of *Hard Boiled*, John Woo's seminal early Nineties action flick, where Tequila and Tony work their way through two floors of a hospital packed with gun-wielding goons. The action is obviously stunning (this is John Woo, after all). What's most amazing about this several minute set piece, however, is that it's all captured in one continuous take. No cuts. Cinephiles harp on about Brian De Palma's long camera takes – really, we feel Woo should be held as the true innovator of this artistic flourish. But here's the kicker: unlike De Palma's *Snake Eyes*, which featured a 15-minute steadicam shot comprised of several well-hidden cuts, Woo only had one chance to get it right. Suffice to say he did.

But few have come close to capturing the insanely ballistic (and equally balletic) delight of early Woo. Which is surprising given the state of special effects and ever-growing film budgets these days. Even Woo himself appears to have become a shadow of his former self (ever since he came to Hollywood and was given a budget it seems). With films still playing catch-up, videogames have had a much easier job doing what Woo used to. Graphics have become progressively better and physics are clearly reaching more robust heights. Games are now at the stage where they can rival and even eclipse some of the greatest action movie sequences.

Monolith's *F.E.A.R.* comes close to emulating early Woo, thanks to its sheer destructive beauty. But it's hampered by an adherence to Asian horror archetypes. *Max Payne* – and in particular *Max Payne 2* – came closer, but they suffer for the fact they're clearly parodying Woo's films. *Stranglehold*, on the other hand, is not only the closest we've come to a John Woo videogame, it also has the man himself working with the team at Midway Chicago.

To give it its full title, *John Woo Presents Stranglehold* sees the return of Inspector Tequila, 'played' once again by Chow Yun Fat (that is, it features his voice and likeness). The story is a direct sequel to *Hard Boiled* and is set a short time after the events of the original film. Tequila is inadvertently pulled into this new action-packed adventure when

Knowing Me, Knowing Woo

What key elements define the man's films?

1 Twin Pistols

If there's one clear image that defines a John Woo film it's Chow Yun Fat standing with both arms spread, a Beretta pistol in each. Sure, practically every pivotal character - good and bad - in Woo's films has done this. But it's Fat we remember as the most iconic. He's like Clint Eastwood with a cigarette in his mouth.

2 Doves

Remember that bit in *Mission Impossible II* where Ethan Hunt blows up the iron door and steps past the burning opening? There's a shot of a glowing white dove that flies in through the opening. We assure you that was not in the script. It's like Woo's signature - and they're every bit as present in *Stranglehold*.

3 Guns in the face

The Killer, Hard Boiled, Hard Target, Broken Arrow, Face/Off... pretty much every John Woo action film sees its main characters, good or bad, reach a point where they just have to point a gun in each other's face. There's even a shot of this happening in *Stranglehold* - proof positive that Woo likes his guns up close and personal.

4 Berettas

Woo doesn't just use any old gun. He believes the Beretta is the prettiest of side arms. We're inclined to agree with him - especially when it's Chow Yun Fat holding it. Or them. That said, Woo certainly isn't impartial to any number of different guns. You'll just find the majority of them Berettas.

5 Sheer Destruction

It wouldn't matter if an action scene was set in a cardboard box: Woo would find a way to make it the most destructive and visceral scene possible. Thankfully, Woo has never shot a scene in a cardboard box. Most of them are confined to locations where even the smallest object is explodable.

Cool moments such as this are incredibly easy to pull off.

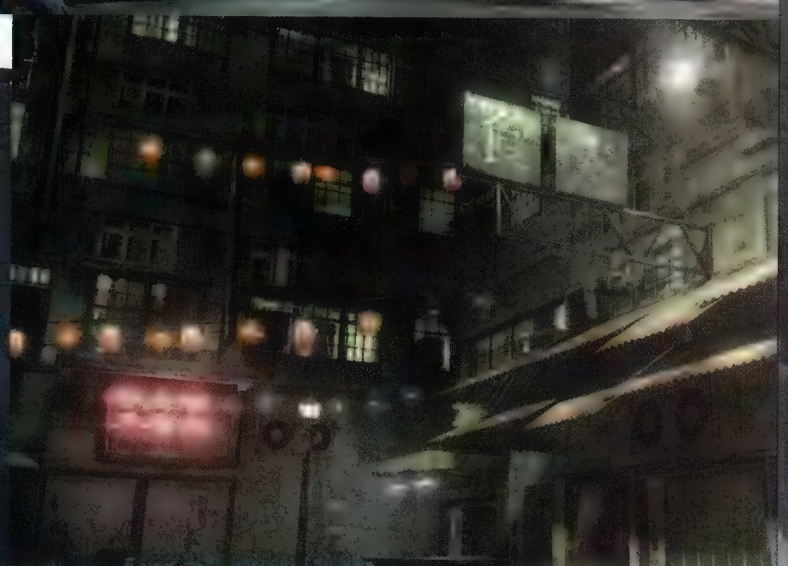
investigating the death of a cop. However, he soon discovers that the case has ties to his family, in particular his estranged wife now living in Chicago. To discover how and why they are both connected to the murder, Tequila must jump either side of the law as he tracks Chinese and Russian mobsters from Hong Kong to Chicago (home of the game's developer).

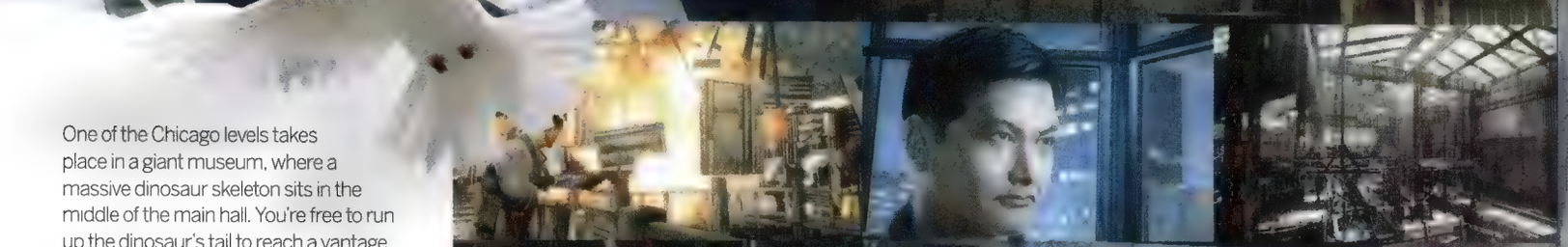
Tequila will face off against enemies in a number of incredibly destructive environments. So destructive in fact that we have to question whether or not the game is too Woo for its own good. It's just so delightfully over the top. We've all seen footage from the teahouse shoot-out where several dozen enemies keep attempting to kill Tequila. It ends with a one-on-one fight against a rocket-launcher-wielding chap. Throughout the eight minutes of footage tables go flying, glass is shattered, walls and pillars are destroyed in a very similar way to the lobby scene in *The Matrix*, there are also more explosions than in all three *Rambo* films combined. Tequila freely runs up banisters, slides across tables and swings from chandeliers while dual wielding like the characters he so often played in Woo's films.

Interacting with the environment is a simple case of approaching something in your peripheral vision that is quickly highlighted (quite distractingly) and hitting the action button. So when you see Tequila doing those balletic movements, it's simply a case of pressing action and letting the game do the work for you. That takes much of the hassle away from navigating specific interactions... but it's to combat the key word in that sentence: hassle. All you have to concern yourself with is aiming for the enemy and pressing action at the right time (taking great pleasure in the violence ensuing on screen). You can of course link specific interactions together too. So if Tequila runs up a banister and a tea trolley sits nearby you can aim in the general direction of the trolley and hit jump. He'll then dive towards the trolley and ride it till it comes to a stop (most likely, guns blazing).

You can also use the environment to your advantage too. In the teahouse level Tequila can kick tables over and use them for cover.

Another iconic image from John Woo's films.





Bullet trails are aplenty in Stranglehold. Bit *Matrix*-y, though.

One of the Chicago levels takes place in a giant museum, where a massive dinosaur skeleton sits in the middle of the main hall. You're free to run up the dinosaur's tail to reach a vantage point (or slide down it, looking bloody cool). Or, you can shoot the hell out of it and let the remnants fall on the enemies below. Ceiling fans, scaffolding and large signs are just some of the things in the environment that you can use to your advantage in a number of ways. There's also a level set in a penthouse that belongs to a Russian mob boss. You're obviously very high up and the windows are destructible. This should hopefully inspire you to blow as many people out of said windows as possible, watching as they pirouette hundreds of feet to their deaths.

There's a chance *Stranglehold* may well be the first mainstream action game to use elements of the Ion Storm-coined 'emergent gameplay'. Although it's a far cry from *Deus Ex* or *Thief 3*, the levels are

It looks like apathy is a real killer... literally.

You don't have to worry about locations not being diverse enough.

still open for you to manipulate any way you wish. You're given an objective and how you achieve it is entirely down to you. You're also given a number of ways to dispatch enemies. More importantly, no two gunf ghts will present the same results in *Stranglehold* (meaning replayability should be through the roof).

This wouldn't be a Woo-affiliated product if it didn't feature slow motion. The use of bullet time – or Tequila Time, as it's known in the game – is rather interesting. Instead of having a meter that you must replenish every time it runs out by killing more enemies (à la *Max Payne*), the game is in charge of whenever it's used. Yes – you read that right. You still have the option to enable it yourself, but the majority of the time the game does it for you. This arbitrary decision ensures you don't have to worry about the meter depleting whenever you use it. All you have to concern yourself with is how bloody cool you look shooting stuff up. Tequila Time isn't governed by a certain speed either: it will fluctuate between different lengths of time and speeds, depending on what's happening. It autonomously turns on when you start doing all

Notice the destruction in the pillars? Guaranteed to be different each time.

Wall/Off

How destructive is Stranglehold?

As we touched on in the main article *Stranglehold* features surprisingly destructive locations. You can practically blow walls and pillars apart, and everything else that isn't tied down too.

When we said no two firefights will present the same results it's because the engine renders all levels as totally destructible, and the havoc you can cause is perhaps overwhelming. At least initially. No one is claiming this game is trying to be realistic - and with that comes the element of gay abandon. Or, in other words, the game lets you see how much you truly can tear the levels up.

next[3] hype

PS3 **Publisher**//EA **Developer**//EA **Genre**//Sport **Players**//1-2
Website//easysports.com/fightnightround3 **Release Date**//March 2007

Float like a butterfly, sting like a PS3

Fight Night Round 3

"HIT HIM! Nicely done. Stop trying to hit him up high, he's blocking all those. Go down low. Like that. Ouch... cover up, cover up! Stop running away, get back there and fight. Yeah, toe to toe. Hit him! HIT HIM!" Then there's a pause as the boxer crashes to the canvas for the ten count. "Ooh, unlucky." And with that, the onlooking crowd disperses to get back to their routine, doing whatever it was they were doing before the momentary distraction pulled them away from the task at hand.

These are the type of noises you'll hear coming from whatever corner of your home you've positioned your PlayStation 3 in and it's not people fighting over controllers. Rather, it's the effect *Fight Night Round 3* has on gamers, whether they're casual or hardcore, young or old, fat or thin. It's one of those games where developers could shout about feeling every blow from your boxer connect without having their fingers crossed behind their backs and trying not to giggle. For once, such grandiose claims would actually be grounded in some sort of reality.

The surprising reason for the brutal realism, and whisper it quietly in case someone hears you, is that *Fight Night Round 3* is the best-looking sports game ever made. No, scrub that, it's easily the best-looking sports game ever made. There's no weak link in *Fight Night*'s armour and it looks as polished as it could possibly be, which is saying something given EA's track record in the sports arena. Without the lifeless puppet animation that made gamers cringe at *FIFA* or the soulless eyes staring through the back of your skull in *NBA Live*, *Fight Night Round 3* has a cohesive, real feel. The nature of the sport itself helps of course – one versus one allows more polygons, processing power and man sweat to be thrown at the pugilists – but let's not make excuses for it, let's celebrate it. *Fight Night Round 3* simply looks stunning. Elderly folk will wonder what why you're pressing buttons on that Sixaxis gizmo when you're watching a boxing match on TV. "It's not a boxing match grandma, it's a videogame." "A video what now?" Never mind.

Now, before the gameplay-over graphics bandwagon gets out its 'Save our playability' banners and pisses on the parade, those protestors should realise that gameplay and graphics go hand-in-hand, enjoying each other's company. *Fight Night Round 3* is anchored around delivering that huge knockout blow that rocks your opponent off his feet and it's the stunning visuals that make it feel so visceral, so real. Simply put, it's the visual attention to detail that makes replays of knockout blows pure pornographic violence.

The Usual Suspects

The boxers you'll be calling "cheap"

Muhammad Ali

Yes, he's the best boxer in *Fight Night Round 3*, combining speed, stamina, power and heart to outlast boxers of all shapes, sizes and styles. His only weakness is his haymaker is fairly slow, so he's forced to rely on his normal array of punches. Who cares though? Pick him anyway.

Bernard Hopkins

James Toney runs him close for the title of Most Powerful Boxer In Fight Night™ but James Toney doesn't share his first name with a sweary comedian or the king of turkey-based food, so we're going with Hopkins. His stamina runs out quickly so try and get the job done by round six.

Ricky Hatton

Sheffield's burger bomber is rendered in his 'getting ready for title fight' physique, rather than his usual 'I haven't got a match for three months and I really love chips' slob-like self. He cuts easily and doesn't recover too well when he's on the wrong end of a bapping, so use his speed and power to keep the pressure up.

Evander Holyfield

Rendered with both ears intact, Holyfield is the leftfield choice for pugilists. He doesn't have the raw power of Hopkins, heart of Marciano or speed of Sugar Ray Robinson but he does have a cracking haymaker and tends to stay in fights until the bitter end. Wear your opponent down then when he tires, knock them out.

EA didn't pay Mike Tyson enough ears to convince him to appear

Having arms the size of tree trunks probably helps in a boxing match. Having never boxed before, it's hard to say.

CONTINUATION //

The boxing glove deforming as it sinks its target, the shockwaves on his cheeks as the crunching blow ripples through his face, the beads of sweat and blood spraying in the air. *Fight Night Round 3*'s devil really is in the details. Say hello to him. Hello devil! The devil is responsible for the boxer's shorts flapping as he fights and the realistic crunch as the boxer's body collapses onto the canvas. The more you look for these details, the more you find. Hell, you can even see the sweat dripping off their muscular bodies! All this is topped off with a gorgeous atmospheric sheen, whether it's the glossy main event brawls at Madison Square Garden arenas or the murky lighting of the downtown gym where you fight your first matches.

So that the gameplay-over-graphics bandwagon doesn't feel completely left out, the game itself is also superb. The idea is easy enough to understand. Stand toe-to-toe with your opponent, punch each other in the face until one of them falls over for more than ten seconds, raise your hand in victory, stamp your name on the front of popular grills and enjoy a quiet retirement. What enhances *Fight Night* as an experience and as a game is the lack of on-screen furniture. Your boxer has a gauge for health and for stamina, but you'd never know it because you're not shown either gauge at any point. Instead, you have to measure your health by the state of your boxer. If his face is starting to resemble a puffy potato, you know it's time to cover up and pray to God the bell signalling the end of the round is seconds away. Likewise, if your legs start to get heavy and your punches are sluggish, desperate lunges rather than crisp jabs and hooks, you know that your stamina is running on empty and you shouldn't have had that last slice of pizza the night before.

Some people moaned that the lack of clearly defined stamina and health gauges reduced *Fight Night Round 3* on the 360 to guesswork, but some people clearly don't know what they're talking about. *Fight Night* became a game of instinct. Take a pounding and you know to back off. Get your opponent on the back foot and you know to press the attack. The lack of health bars made any risky counter-attacks in the face of a flurry of punches even more courageous and even more satisfying if they happened to work.

Regardless, EA is clever enough to safeguard against forcing you to fight completely blind and when your boxer is

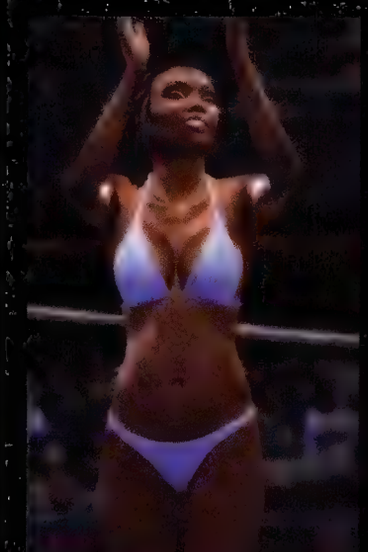
This is why *Fight Night Round 3* is so awesome. Those punches *hurt*.

about to go weak at the knees, you'll be treated to a Whoosy Camera Effect™ as the background noise becomes a tense hush and your heartbeat can be heard. While in this fragile state, any punch that finds its target will send you crashing to the canvas, so you have to cover up and stave off an attack for ten seconds until you recuperate and can fend for yourself once more. To soften your opponent up for the knockout blow is satisfying enough, as you become the hunter hunting the wounded animal and looking for the kill, but to escape from this tricky predicament standing on two feet? Almost as satisfying as landing the knockout itself.

This is all controlled using the analogue sticks. The left stick moves you around the ring and when used in conjunction with the shoulder buttons, allows you to duck, weave, block and parry punches. In the meantime, over in the red corner, the right stick controls your punches. Quick stabs with the stick equate to rapid-fire jabs, while rolling lunges with the stick translate to fearsome uppercuts. Combine this with the shoulders for body blows and illegal blows such as head butts and punches to the crotch and hey presto, you've got yourself an innovative, interesting control system. It's not

The Unusual Suspects

EA can do boxers but EA sure can't do ring-girls



Amanda
Look at her eyes! Look at how dead she is inside! Amanda wouldn't moan if you watched the football over *Corrie*, she would just sit there staring holes through the wall. Still, she scores bonus points for bringing Richard O'Brien to the ring with her. Not as good as Burger King but then Burger King doesn't shout, "Can you start the fans please?!" to put opponents off.

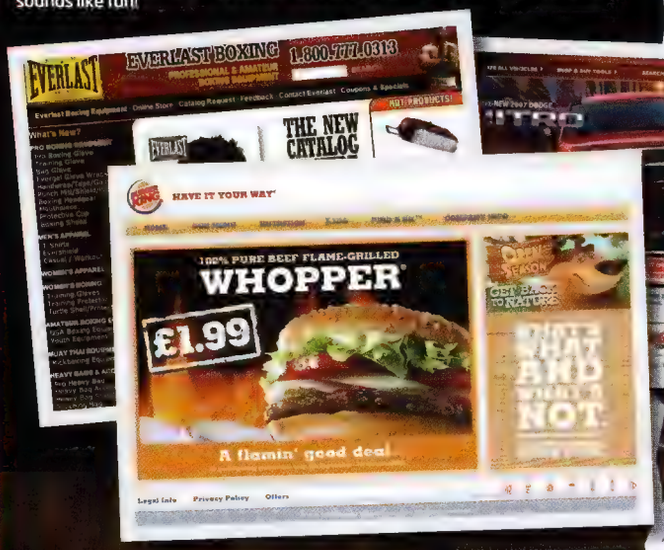
Jessica
Her legs look almost four times as big as her arms. Four times! Is that right? No one's ever measured before. The sweat runs the whole way down her body too, zipping to the left or to the right depending on where you look. We didn't think sweaty girls could ever be portrayed in a non-sexy light before. Clearly, we don't think enough about these things.

Kristin
While she earns high marks for her professionalism - she seems to be the only one doing her bloody job - her eyes are too far apart. She looks like that girl in the distorted pictures of the weird early PS2 ads. If that's not bad enough, her left forearm is wasting away because of some kind of disease. Equality by EA or bad graphics? The former. Definitely the former.

Why Burger King?

In-game advertising explained! Kind of!

We've mentioned Burger King's inclusion in the main text but EA didn't just decide to throw him in there for giggles, because they thought he might get "a bit of a laugh". Just as in real life, adverts adorn the inside of the ring and in this case, the boxing ring is covered with Burger King logos. Good thing or bad thing? Depends on who you ask; however, EA can quite reasonably claim it's merely an attempt to recreate the real world advertising of boxing. Also look out for trophies named after real-world companies in a further attempt to slip advertising into *Fight Night* when everyone is too busy bapping hapless opponents to notice. The Everlast trophy is fair enough, given Everlast is a popular manufacturer of boxing apparel, but the Dodge trophy? Dodge makes trucks. We can't remember the last time we saw a truck boxing in the ring. Maybe we need to start watching the sport more. It sounds like fun!



Ali's haymaker, a straight punch to the face, is awfully slow. Stick to uppercuts and hooks instead.

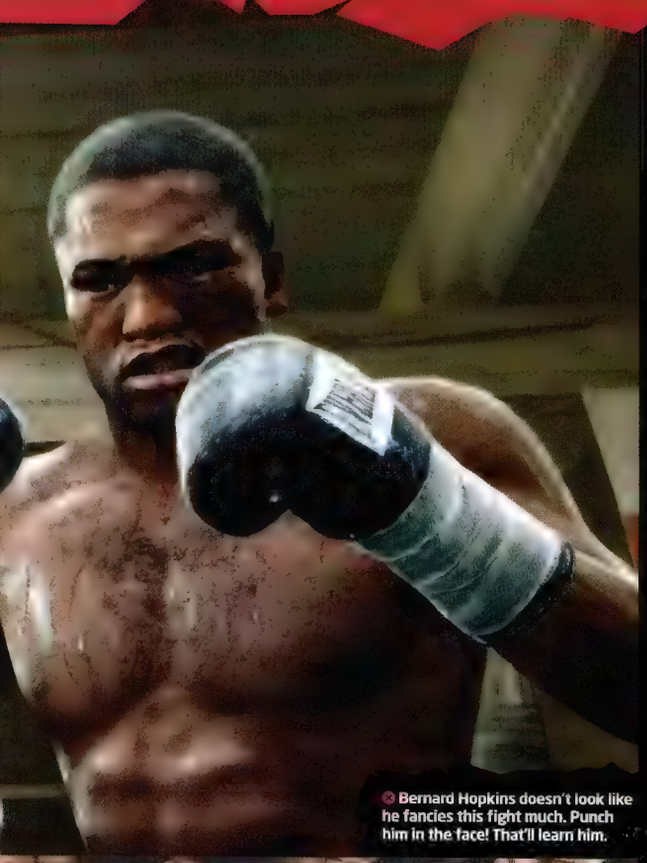
CONTINUATION //

as intuitive as the developers like to believe, because the fact that the right analogue controls both arms means you need some sort of awareness of the shoulder buttons and it doesn't feel second nature for a long time. Even so, compared to using the face buttons? The contest is as one-sided as throwing Butterbean in the ring against one of George Foreman's grills.

Fight Night Round 3 on the 360 also saw the stun blow added as a new weapon in your arsenal. This was a punch that, if it connected, switched to a first-person view for you to rain further blows on your opponent, who is forced to cover up and defend. It was a weird shift in style and didn't really work as well as it should, partly because no one liked the change in control dynamics as the view shifted, mostly because it looked rubbish as well.

Rewind and go back two paragraphs and find the word 'parry'. No doubt, you skipped past it presuming it to be an ultimately overlooked feature, yet this is what provides *Fight Night Round 3* on the PS3 with its deep gameplay. Combining guesswork and instinct with your own razor-sharp reactions, parrying is sacrificing the safety of a block for a specific parry. Blocking covers the top or lower half of your body but parrying only covers a specific side of that particular half, leaving you exposed everywhere else. It seems like suicide. Yet parrying has to be mastered because the reward for doing it successfully is that your opponent loses his balance and needs a few seconds to recover, staggering around open and vulnerable to whatever attack you choose. Exposed chin? Meet fist. Fist? Exposed chin.

In between each round, the cutsman gets a chance to heal your wounds as best as he can in the short time limit. Naturally, as Videogame Law circa 1997 dictates that big variations on gameplay within the main game itself has to be done via a mini-game. The cutsman gets out the sponge or these bizarre-looking cotton wool bud sticks and then you control where he rubs it on your face, to try and soak up blood and reduce swelling. It's a cute option but once



Bernard Hopkins doesn't look like he fancies this fight much. Punch him in the face! That'll learn him.

Buttons Versus Stick

Bizarre online argument yet to be decided

One really strange side effect of throwing the controls on to the analogue sticks was something EA completely overlooked. A few days after *Fight Night Round 3*'s release on Xbox 360, complaints emerged that EA didn't allow online players to differentiate between those using analogue sticks and those using face buttons. The issue here was those using only face buttons would get punches out far, far quicker than their analogue stick-using counterparts. Not only can you press a button faster than you can swing an analogue stick but there was no chance of screwing up the button press either, while the analogue stick did introduce a small margin of error. The argument erupted soon after and actually led to most players quitting in disgust as 'face spammers' were beating analogue stick users with ease. No word on whether EA has introduced the ability to differentiate for Playstation 3's version, but if we had to guess, the answer would probably be no.

most players saw the button that did all this automatically for you, it was soon forgotten about in favour of punching people in the face.

You can guess what Season mode is. Humble boxer with awful stats has meaningless matches against local trainees in the nearby gym and slowly but surely works his way up the ladders until he's facing off against the likes of Joe Frazier and Roy Jones Jr. The boxer list is decent enough to include the likes of Muhammad Ali, Jake LaMotta and Evander Holyfield, so there are plenty to choose from. That won't stop boxing fans from being disappointed at a few notable omissions. There's no Joe Louis, the boxer who was the first ever 'accepted' black athlete in white middle-class America, which is a real shame, while EA didn't pay Mike Tyson enough ears to convince him to appear either.

So you create your style of boxer from powerhouse southpaw, nippy cruiserweight or whatever you fancy, then start battling the no-name losers. Rivalries develop, respect is earned and you put in time training yourself up to Hulk-like proportions. Before each fight, you get the chance to hit the gym and choose what area to practice; for example, the combo dummy to build up the speed of your punches or pumping iron to increase your overall power. As your boxer bulks up, you can see the effects of your training when you climb between the ropes. You started out as a skinny whelp who the milkman laughed at. Now, you're a monster who feasts on the broken spirits of the weak and cried pains of the fallen.

The artificial intelligence of the boxers themselves was somewhat suspect in the Xbox 360 version, as it seemed the only thing that was increasing was your opponent's ability to throw increasingly harder punches as they always seemed rather slow at getting out the way of incoming fists. Regardless, it's amazing how many rivalries develop in your head over the course of a Season mode, more so when you consider most of your opponents are fictional and simply padding numbers. If an opponent beats you while you're new and not too confident with the controls, you'll remember his name for when you've spent an insane number of hours down the gym and can confidently slap him around the ring. They're only lines of code though, right? Try saying that after they taunt you for the fifth time running when sending you to the canvas.

As you beat boxers, you get to unlock their moves. If you beat Roy Jones Jr, you can unlock his special weave-then-uppercut haymaker along with his stick-his-chin-out-knowing-you-won't-be-able-to-hit-him taunt, as it's snappily called. You can also buy new clothing for your boxer with stat boosts, adding a gentle whiff of RPG amongst the stench of blood and sweat, so you're constantly honing and refining your boxer as he clambers to the top of the championship ladder. Before you ask; yes, you can use your created boxers in multiplayer and yes, it will start arguments.

Something worth mentioning that's just occurred to us – you get to fight Burger King. Not the Burger King, because he's too busy back at the Royal Burger Palace laughing at the likes of hot dogs, pizza and other fast food snacks to slip on the boxing gloves and duke it out. Rather, there's a Burger King sponsored fight as part of your rise to the top of the boxing ladder. Naturally, given Burger King has sponsored it, he decides to show up and can be seen accompanying the fighters to the ring and dancing alongside them.

This is everything you need to know about *Fight Night Round 3*. It has the looks, it has the controls, it has everything you could possibly expect from a videogame and then it goes and throws the Burger King in on top of all that. *Fight Night Round 3* will easily be the best sports game for PS3 upon its release and that's something we can say without having our fingers crossed behind our backs.

%complete

PS3 Publisher: EA Developer: EA M[illegible] Release: // Players: /
Website: ww[illegible]a.com/armyoftwo/

All-American PAI

Army Of Two

BADASS is not a superlative we throw around here often at Next3. It's reserved only for discussing Jack Bauer's latest exploits on *24*, or when we condemn Craig, our staff writer, for the fact he does actually have a bad arse... something the rest of the team is constantly suffering from as a result of. But as far as the description itself is concerned, we really can't think of one more apt to describe EA Montreal's third-person co-operative tactical shooter, *Army Of Two*. This is all the more impressive as it's the developer's first game, as well as its first on PS3. Also, while it's easy to take hyperbole such as Montreal stating it is setting out to redefine the co-op gaming experience with a pinch of salt – we can't escape the feeling *Army Of Two* just might live up to and possibly even exceed that potential.

Set an undisclosed amount of time in the future, the game's story finds the US Army in a bit of a sorry state. Stretching itself too thinly across the globe, attempting to tackle ever increasing threats that are constantly presenting themselves, it now requires the assistance of private military corporations – or PMCs for short – to tackle its most dangerous operations. Tyson Rios and Eliot Salem are two ex-Army Rangers now working for one such PMC as guns for hire.

You may have read about PMCs in the very pages of this magazine, with our 8-page preview of *Metal Gear Solid 4* in issue three. Unlike Kojima's next opus, Montreal's *Army Of Two* is going to be a more grounded, realistic endeavour that capitalises on real-world events with a topical story. It tackles the moral and ethical implications of being a private military contractor. This isn't to say *MGS4* will shy away from such things; it's just that the presentation of the same things in both games is naturally going to be handled differently. As we're sure you've come to realise with Kojima, his games tend to feature stories that err on the side of the decipher extravagance and over the top. Not to mention unreal.

So in that sense, and if you don't mind us making a high-concept prediction, it might be best to imagine *Army Of Two* as the *Three Kings* to *Metal Gear Solid 4*'s *Starship Troopers*. While the intricacies of the story are understandably being kept under wraps, we do know that a portion of it takes place in Afghanistan, as well as several other 'real world' locations. Make of that what you will. Montreal has spent considerable time working with real-life private military

We can't escape the feeling that this just might live up to and even exceed its potential

CONTINUATION//

contractors to understand just how they operate, as well as to understand what the process of becoming one is actually like. In that sense, it's worth expecting a certain amount of realism from the game.

However, don't mistake *Army Of Two* for anything other than gung-ho fun. It's a game that seems to have its tongue planted firmly in cheek, and – as we mentioned earlier – it also exudes that badass charm in buckets. Just take a look at the shots of Rios and Salem, the game's main playable characters, and the personalised armour both are decked out in. There's something intrinsically cool about the fact the two of them look like walking tanks. The skull on Salem's mask and the flames on Rios' certainly don't hurt either. If that isn't tongue in cheek we don't know what is... well, perhaps a running-from-the-white-light mini-game when one of you dies, but we're just getting ahead of ourselves now.

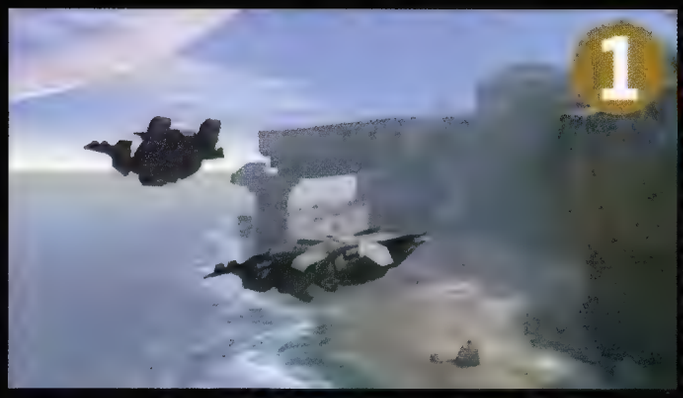
When talking about *Army Of Two*, it's important to begin with the very feature that defines it: co-operative gameplay. This is something that has always been celebrated as an extra mode in games, rather than some extensive feature in and of itself. *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* boasted one of the more recent, and arguably best, co-op designs, with two spies having to work together to manipulate levels designed specifically for two players. But it was still very much an aspect of the multiplayer component. *Gears Of War* enables four-player co-op and it's extremely fun and addictive stuff. However, it's based entirely on the single-player campaign, so all the surprises will be spoilt for you because you're already aware of the outcome.

The first thing you should know about *Army Of Two* is that co-op is not a mode: it's the game – the whole game, in fact. Every

▽ FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 // ARMY OF TWO / DEF JAM ICON △

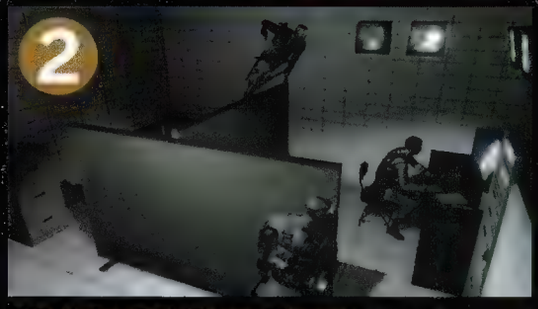
Ten of the Best Co-op Games

This list is in no way official. That said, it's Next3's opinion – and that makes it fact!



1 Halo Xbox/2002

We could have mentioned *Halo 2* instead, but then the sequel features nothing on the sheer majestic scale as The Silent Cartographer - one of the best co-operative levels ever created in a videogame. Despite the fact its sequel is a truly worthy successor, *Halo* is steeped more in our affections than its predecessor. It was the one that set the benchmark for co-op games of the last generation. Unfortunately, both *Halos* could only be played in co-operative offline - despite Bungie first announcing *Halo 2* would actually have an online version. That said, playing the first game with a friend beside you proved so much more engaging.

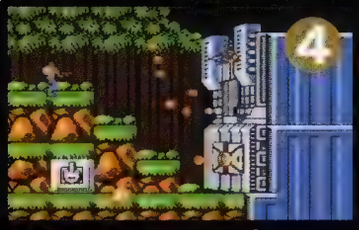


2 Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory Xbox/2005

Chaos Theory's has perhaps the best online co-operative mode on the Xbox - so much so we're surprised Ubisoft didn't just release it as its own game. It includes several original levels designed specifically for co-op, and it's own separate story too.

3 Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance PS2/Xbox 2001

Thank God *Dark Alliance* actually had a co-op. It's one of those games that throws so many enemies at you that after a time it becomes a chore playing on your own. However, with a friend it's pretty much underrated brilliance with a fantasy edge.



4 Contra Snes

The game that practically defined the whole run-and-gun concept, Contra is also fondly remembered for its kick-arse co-op mode. Graphics are dated by today's standards, but it still provides raw two-player fun.

5 Twisted Metal Black PS2/2001

Absolute and sheer destruction in a dark, twisted world - where psychopaths are given the chance to tear each other to shreds. It's the perfect foundation for a co-op experience and one of the best games on PS2 to boot.

6 TimeSplitters 2 PS2/Xbox/GC 2002

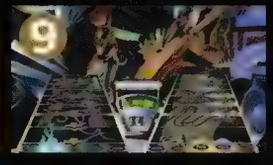
Here at Next3, we have a soft spot for the *TimeSplitters 2* game - in part thanks to the *Akira*-inspired Neo-Tokyo and the opening *GoldenEye*-esque levels.

7 SWAT4 PC 2005

Irrational Games' *SWAT 4* is not only one of the best co-op games on any platform, it's also arguably the best close-quarters tactical shooter. With a heavy emphasis on mise-en-scène level design and randomly generated enemies, its co-op is highly entertaining and immersive stuff.

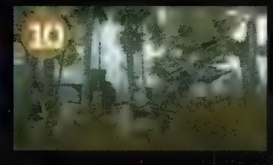
8 Serious Sam 2 Xbox 2002

One of the most unashamedly dumb games in existence, it's also one of the most fun. With literally hundreds of enemies - some of which are the biggest seen in a game - and a wicked sense of humour, *Serious Sam 2* features a co-op that means business.



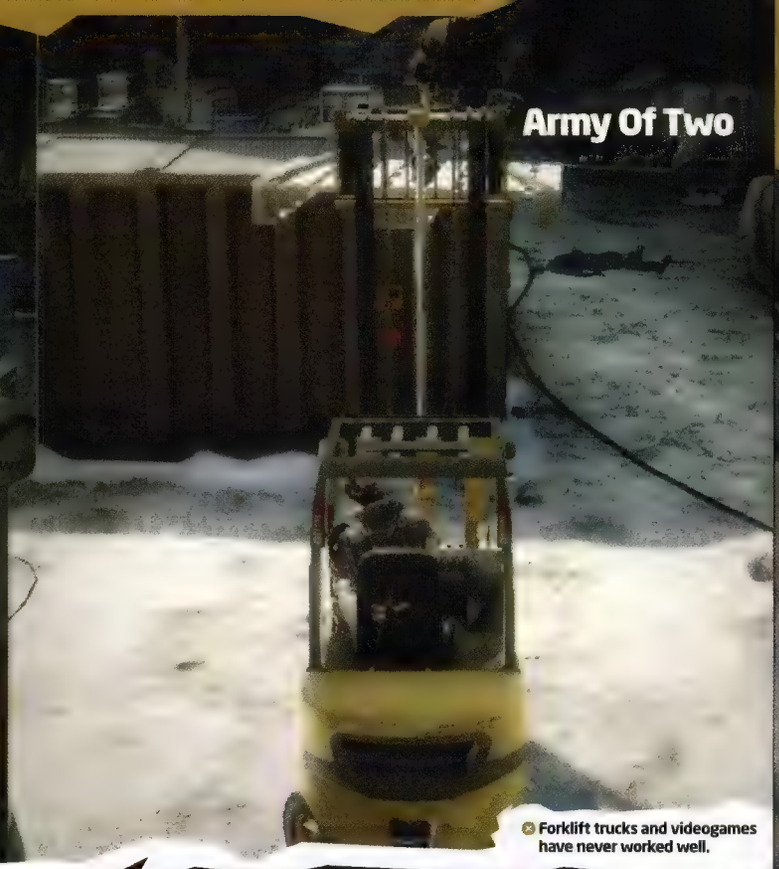
9 Guitar Hero 2 PS2 2006

Sure, everyone has their favourite tracks to play through, but we're partial to a little bit of *Strutter* by KISS. With one player on lead guitar and one on bass, *Guitar Hero 2* is a much more involving game than the first. By virtue of that, it's also even better.



10 Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter Xbox 360 2006

GRAW has a brilliant multiplayer component, but the co-op is particularly engrossing. It's a shame the game couldn't be set during the Mexico City levels, but the locations featured are still fun.



Forklift trucks and videogames have never worked well.

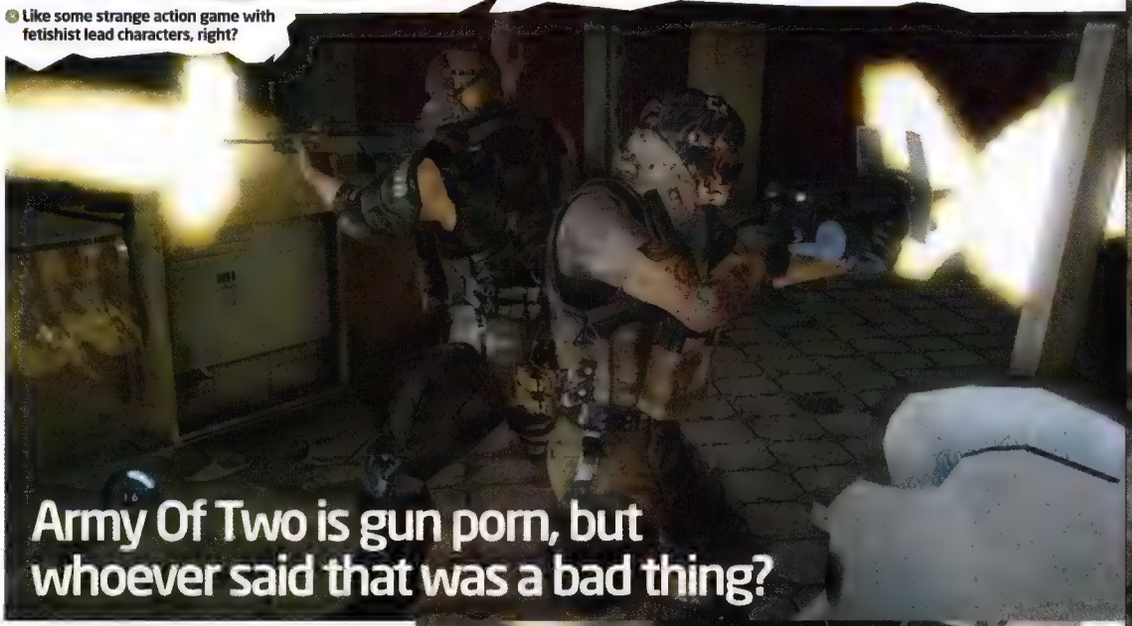
single aspect of *Army Of Two* has been built around the idea of forcing Rios and Salem to work together. Co-operation is your key to success, and this includes such things as a tandem parachute jump with Rios and Salem buckled together, where one character controls the descent as another snipes the enemies on the ground. In one situation, Rios manned a forklift truck and raised Salem high enough for them to peer over a tall wall, killing the enemies on the other side. You can even order both characters to enter a Dual Snipe mode that forces the screen to split into three frames: one at the top showing Rios and Salem aiming, two at the bottom left and right showing their respective sniper scope POVs.

The aforementioned death mini-game is worth talking about too, as it's one of the game's more outlandish ideas. Should Rios or Salem take a bullet and require CPR, one player has to carry that out, manipulating the analogue sticks to a certain rhythm, as the downed player button mashes to escape the ever-encroaching white light. Furthermore, should the player delivering CPR screw up that rhythm, it'll cause the downed player to fall over, therefore having to mash like crazy to get back on their feet. Like we said, it's outlandish stuff – and certainly something we were very critical of when we first discovered it. Since then we've all come to embrace it for what it is: a mere slice of dumb fun. Most of all, what it does is underline the ethos of this game: co-operation is key.

Fighting through the various levels will therefore bring a certain air of non-linearity, enabling you both to employ whatever tactics you prefer. Are you going to head straight in there, blowing stuff up, or will you adopt a more tactical approach? You're free to do whatever you choose – just as long as it suits the pair of you. It's worth stopping for a moment to highlight the fact that two- player works much like you would expect, either online or off. You can have a friend sitting in the same room as you, with two pads, playing from the one screen. Or, you can set up system link. For online gamers it's a simple case of finding out when your friend is playing then seamlessly dropping straight into the game with them. It'll kick out the AI-controlled partner and let you take over from wherever they last were.

Speaking of which, anti-social readers need not worry about having to invite friends into your home to play with you. The game features some of the more robust partner AI – or PAI as it's referred to in the game – we've seen. It's also doing some pretty exciting things with voice recognition software. In the same way *Unreal Tournament 2007* is trying to invoke an offline experience that feels like you're playing online, with the player shouting

Like some strange action game with fetishist lead characters, right?



Army Of Two is gun porn, but whoever said that was a bad thing?

Note the facial plates on the rifle... it's there for a good reason.

Many situations will call for Rios and Salem to split up.

The Odd Couple

The art of working together

As we mentioned in the main article, there are going to be dozens of circumstances where both players have to tackle the same situation together, each doing their own respective part to ensure a positive outcome. In these examples you can see how both players are working together - the screen splits to highlight just what each player is doing. You can expect more diverse situations than this in the full game, but the developer is obviously keeping schtum on what they involve.

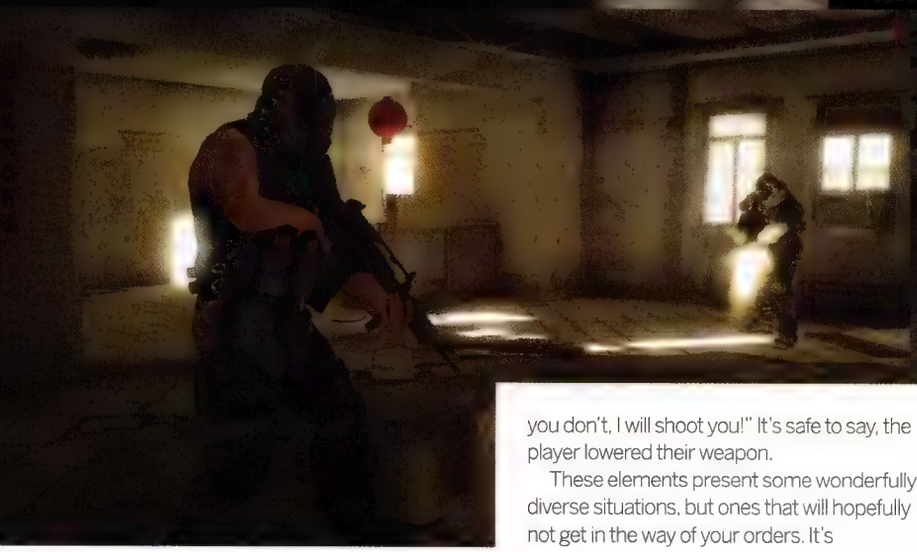
The Chop Shop

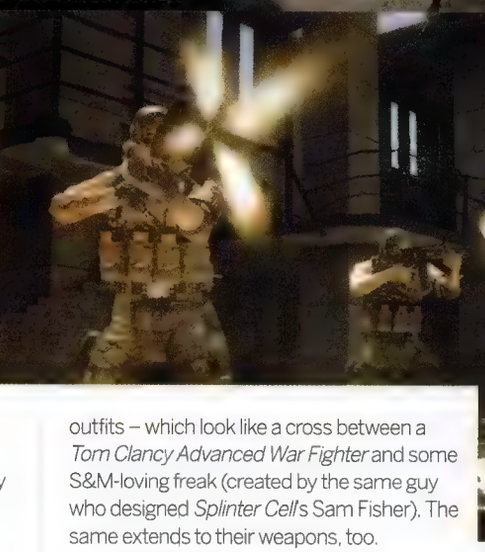
The very place to pimp out your weapons and gadgets

At the start of each mission, players gets to select which character they'd prefer to play with: Salem or Rios. Whether or not each brings their own strengths and weaknesses to the game remains to be seen - but given the diversity in the characters (Rios is the more headstrong leader, while Salem is a bit of a wild card) and the facial insignia, we wouldn't be surprised if they did.

Completing missions and successfully earning money is the name of the game. At the end of each mission the player gets to visit a gun shop where they can purchase new weapons, upgrades, gadgets and so on. Better yet, the players get to take their weapons to the firing range and try them out before buying them. Given the sheer absurdity in the number of ways you can customise your weapons, we expect to be spending an awful lot of time in here.

The one element of the game that received the most derision here at Next3... we love it now, though.





CONTINUATION//

directions and requests and the AI carrying them out, *Army Of Two* is looking to emulate, and in some circumstances exceed, what Epic is planning. During one encounter, enemies attacked Rios and Salem on all sides. The player shouting into their headset for the two of them to go back-to-back – but the PAI reacted by declaring, "What is this, an action movie?" It took another heated request from the player before the PAI responded.

In another stunning display of PAI, the player ordered the two of them to enter a Dual Snipe mode. But given the fact that player had messed up on the previous snipe, when they shouted "On my mark!" the PAI retaliated with, "No, on *my* mark! You messed up last time." At this point the player was left with a choice to follow their partner, or push to carry out their own order. They opted for the latter and after some particularly heated banter the PAI chose to obey the player. Banter is just one of the functions of PAI you can expect, as is the AI remembering things. In some situations it will even threaten to put you down. When the player pointed a gun at an unarmed hostage, the PAI responded with, "Hey, we don't shoot unarmed hostages". As the player left their sights on the civilian, the PAI raised its gun on the player, shouting, "Lower your weapon! If you don't, I will shoot you!" It's safe to say, the player lowered their weapon.

These elements present some wonderfully diverse situations, but ones that will hopefully not get in the way of your orders. It's important to remember that the pair of you are mercenaries and the aim is to complete your missions and earn money in the process. Cash can then be spent on new gadgets and weapon upgrades. That latter aspect is one of the more interesting avenues *Army Of Two* is pursuing: the idea of customising weapons to suit the player.

If you'll pardon the crude example, much in the same way *Need For Speed Carbon* enables you to create original car designs, so will *Army Of Two*. This is unsurprising really when you consider both are EA games. Longer barrels, extended magazine clips, laser sights, sniper scopes, grenade launcher add-ons and so on are just a few of the areas you can pimp your weapon out with. And that's just the M4 rifle. There are hundreds of different customisations you can come up with in *Army Of Two*. Despite their ballistic facial armour, you can go the extra length to ensure their safety by sticking some faceplate armour on the rifles too.

Make no mistake: this is gun porn, but whoever said that was a bad thing in games? As mercenaries are free from the army regime it means Rios and Salem can essentially wear whatever they choose into battle, hence their outfits – which look like a cross between a *Tom Clancy Advanced War Fighter* and some S&M-loving freak (created by the same guy who designed *Splinter Cell*'s Sam Fisher). The same extends to their weapons, too.

There's little doubt how important co-op gaming has become of late – but *Army Of Two* is the first game to take it into next-gen territory. If it's not the stunning graphics, complimentary of EA's next-gen Inertia engine (enabling up to fifty enemies on screen at once), it's the partner's AI and the fact that it remembers things. Beyond those, there's the wonderful voice recognition and the seamless drop-in, drop-out nature of the online co-op mode. So never let it be said that *Army Of Two* is light on the innovations. Any reservations we have are that the story, given how many of the developers worked on *Splinter Cell*, might end up as nothing more than an excuse to string set-pieces together – rather than the moral and ethical examination it paints itself as. But that's more our worrying than anything concrete. Given how much good there is in *Army Of Two*, we'd be hard-pressed to believe it'll be anything short of brilliant.

Every single aspect of Army Of Two has been built around the idea of forcing Rios and Salem to work together

%complete

Def Jam: Icon

Back with another block-rocking treat

PS3 **Publisher**//EA **Developer**//EA Chicago **Genre**//Beat-'em-up **Players**//1-2
Website//www.defjamenterprises.com **Release Date**//March

Not quite a roundhouse kick to the face, but if a bruised ribcage doesn't hurt him, the fire will.

HOT ON the heels of EA's knockout news that *Fight Night* was on its way to Playstation 3, it followed up the awesome one-two announcement combo by releasing some intriguing insights on the new *Def Jam* game, currently dubbed, *Icon*. The first nugget of information referred to the combat system, which like many 'next-gen' fist-fests, has been mapped onto the analogue sticks à la *Fight Night*. While the migration to analogue is attempting to establish a new fighting mechanic, the treatment of the music should make for a completely new experience all together.

Rather than just being a supplement to the fighting in the foreground, the bouncin' beats actually influence every part of the fight. As the tunes are belted out of the speakers, the game's in-built equalisers detect the beats and rhythms and then make the entire environment bounce along with in. In the demo we got to grips with, while Ludacris and Big Boi were throwing fists, the base pumping in the background was causing windows to shatter, walls to crumble and cars to shake. The more thunderous the bass, the more damage it caused.

The music doesn't just have an affect on your surroundings, but also on your fighting style, as the key to winning a showdown (or should that be 'ho-down'?) is knowing the tracks better than your opponent. To cause extra damage you can synchronise combos and jabs to the beat of the music, making your opponent spit blood while the DJ spits the rhymes. Once you've perfected the art you can then start throwing your foe into the environment's elements at the climax of a beat to trigger new effects like fireballs and steam blasts. But don't go thinking that if you're not down with the hip hop scene that you'll be at a disadvantage; EA says you'll have the option to import your own music tracks and the equaliser will recognise the bass line and attune the game accordingly.

Amongst all this innovation, *Icon* does include some beat-'em-up fundamentals such as character-specific fighting styles and various customisable attacks. However, we suggest choosing your 'playa' wisely as the dominant combatant earns the ability to dictate what music the virtual DJ plays, effectively seizing the advantage. With *Icon* still in its infancy, EA hasn't disclosed which hip-hop homies will star or the final track listing, but with all these new details to mull over that's more than enough for the time being.

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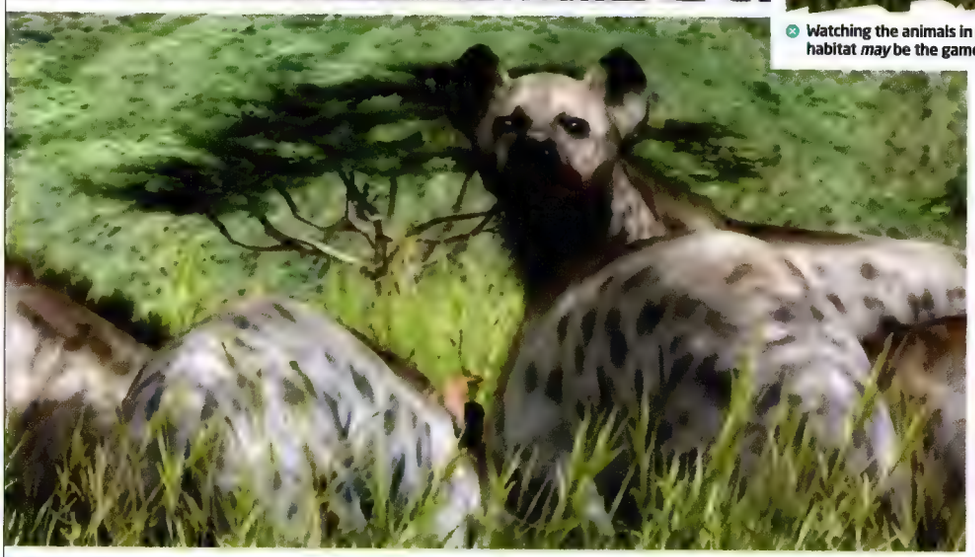
At present only a handful of environments and characters have been demoed, but plenty more badass-gangsta types are certainly on the way.

If you're used to *Fight Night* mechanics then you might have an advantage when it comes to crushing punches.

Watching the animals in their natural habitat *may* be the game's focus.



The moment in the trailer where you say, "Oooooh! Interesting!"

Afrika

Hurry boy, it's waiting there for you

PS3 **Publisher**//Sony **Developer**//Rhino Studios **Genre**//TBA **Players**//TBA
Website//www.sony.com **Release date**//2007

WE LIKE ANIMALS a lot. In fact the only thing we find better than an animal is a unicorn, but that's another story. With our love of animals in mind, *Afrika* could be the sort of game the Next3 team would happily lose itself in. We say might because at the moment we can only speculate as to what kind of game it is. There's very little info available and its current name is only a working title, too.

But here's what we do know: it's set in Africa, and there are indigenous animals that go about their incredibly realistic – almost wild life documentary-like – lives. You will play several different characters that will each most likely present their own specific traits. Phil Harrison revealed that the game is being aimed at those seeking true escapism – perhaps living up to their harboured desires to venture into Africa.

There's a chance it might turn out a lot like *Pokémon Snap*, where the player is tasked with following and collecting footage of animals in their real habitats – trying their best not to disturb the piece. Cheetahs, zebras, hippos, elephants, rhinos – just about everything you can fit in. There is obviously going to be gameplay, but it won't relate to conflict. It's like a wish-fulfilment experience, essentially. We just wish we had more info.

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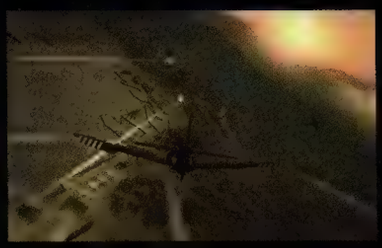

Blazing Angels

Mayday, mayday, videogame down, videogame down

PS3 **Publisher**// Ubisoft **Developer**// In-house **Genre**// Flight sim
Players// 1-2 **Website**// www.blazing-angels.com/uk **Release date**// March

BLAZING *Angels* is a weird one. Half flight sim, half arcade shooter and suffering from numerous issues both in visuals and gameplay, we're pushed to find a reason for its upcoming release on the Playstation 3. As an early Xbox 360 title that many folk on our Microsoft sister mags would like to forget, *Blazing Angels* is not one of the most eagerly anticipated titles here at Next3 either. It's not so much that it was such a weak 360 effort from Ubisoft, but that by the time March rolls around it'll be a whole year old. What's worse, of course, is that even in those most upbeat of things, the press release, there's little mention of anything new – let alone a complete overhaul of the game – to get us excited. This leaves us with nothing other than mindless trivia to impart. For the trivia addicts then, here are the facts. All three of them. *Blazing Angels* will include, in the words of the press release "innovative use of the Playstation®3 controller", along with new missions and a "heart-pounding 16-player multiplayer mode". Nope, sorry that just doesn't do it for us. Short of a complete turnaround in attitude from Ubisoft and a serious overhaul, *Blazing Angels* will have the dubious accolade of being amongst the first to line the bargain bins of your local videogame vendor.

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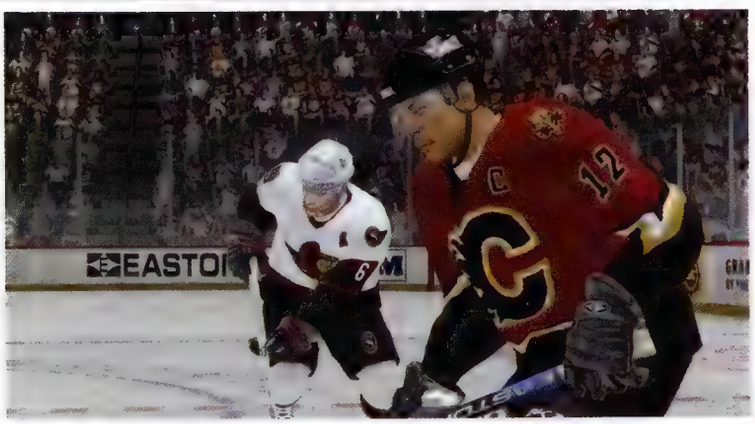
PS3 **Publisher**// 2K Sports **Developer**// Kush Games **Genre**// Sports **Players**// 1-
Website// http://2ksports.com/games/nhl2k7/ **Release date**// Q2 2007

Ice and a slice sir?

NHL 2K7



IT'S ANNOYING when rival titles in a genre don't compete with each other; it means that you have to go out and buy two games rather than one. But it so rarely happens that it's not common enough to make a deal of. *NHL 2K7* and EA's *NHL '07* are one such duo of titles that pretty much have each others' backs covered in the genre, each refusing to step on the other's toes and being pretty much even in our opinion. However, *NHL 2K7* is perhaps considered the more fun of the two and has a wealth of improvements over previous instalments to create some interest from the ice hockey fans out there.

The most significant changes come in the form of some seriously enhanced physics, both in terms of puck and skating physics. While it's not entirely clear how much has been added to the stick and puck movement, it seems obvious that the main focus has been on the momentum of the players in the new skating engine. With a more involved franchise mode and dynamic rivalry system that allows you to make friends and enemies over the course of your seasons. Whether all this pushes the *NHL 2K* series into a clear first position is a different matter.

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Skate

EA's first outing on a board since Skate Or Die

How well will *Skate* stand up against the mighty Hawk and his latest update?

PS3 Publisher // EA Developer // Black Box Genre // Sports Players // TBA Website // www.ea.com Release date // 2007

JUST like riding a bike, skating is something you never forget how to do. But that only applies to those who ever bothered to learn how to do it in the first place, which kind of rules all us lot at Next3 out. Virtually, however, we are all kings of the ramps and have been since the early days of the gaming genre. From *California Games* to *720* to *Skate Or Die* (EA's first title that was created internally), it's fair to say that we have pretty much mastered them all. Of course, they have held varying degrees of interest over the years and had their own rivals... with the exception of *Tony Hawk's*.

But that looks set to change, and just in time for a next-generation scrap with the dominant force in extreme sports, *Skate* is trundling on the scene with the very brave assumption that it can make a dent in one of the most sewn-up markets ever erm... sewn.

So how are EA going to do this then? What have they got up their sleeve to sway us from *Tony Hawk*? Probably the most intriguing promise is the inclusion of physics-driven tricks and animations guaranteeing that no two tricks will ever be exactly the same. However, the proof of the pudding is very much in the tasting with this kind of title and until we get to grips with the control mechanic we will just have to sit on the fence and look cool.

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We're hoping *Skate*'s 'realistic approach' won't stop us busting out awesome combos.

Camera shy

EA push clever camera system

The intelligent camera system has been similarly touted as both revolutionary and able to deliver the most realistic skating experience ever. Of course, that touting is being done by EA, so we have to take it all with a pinch of salt until we get some hands-on time with it. From initial gut reactions, we're anticipating something a little closer to the likes of *SSX* than *Tony Hawk*, as EA's Blackbox studios are looking to eschew the traditional button-intensive controls for something a little more intuitive.

Vampire's Rain

Ve vant to zuck your blood... if it's sunny

PS3 **Publisher**//AQ Interactive **Developer**//Artoon **Genre**//Action **Players**//TBA
Website//www.vampirerain.com **Release date**//2007

YOU SEE them everyday. They wear dark hoods, sport slick dark hair and hang about dark corners. No, we're not referring to vampires here, but of the generation of youth that has changed the once-terrifying vampire into a cool popular fad.

Producer of *Vampire's Rain* Naoto Oshima dislikes this fabrication and has decided to create a terrifying experience to re-summon the fear that once circulated the almighty vampire. What to expect from the man who has worked on *Sonic The Hedgehog* games in this respect is anyone's guess, but it's intriguing nonetheless. He states how he will instil intimidation, how vampires are faster than humans and are immune to tradition weapons.

It will take place in Los Angeles, a city that experiences little rain. You see, vampires don't like rain, so it will play a tactical role to exploit when it pours. The game will also offer immense freedom with the ability to roam anywhere on the map, such as rooftops and fire escapes. With network multiplayer included and the fact you get to play as a vampire and do malicious things, *Vampire's Rain* is one to watch.

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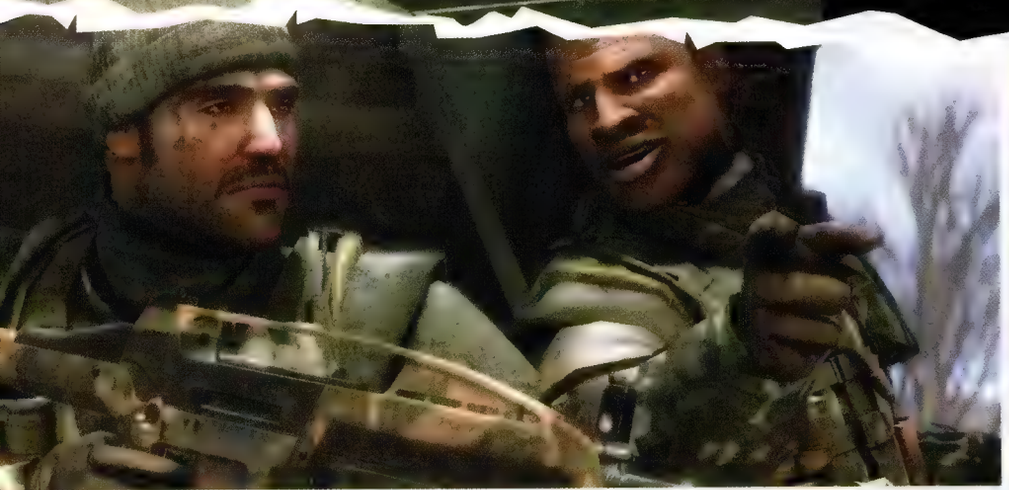

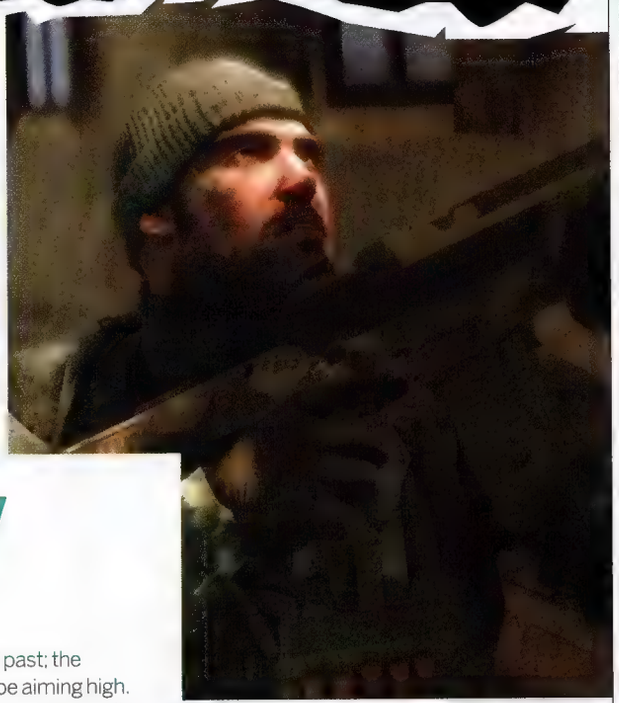

Battlefield: Bad Company

'Bad Company' certainly not referring to the PS3

DIGITAL ILLUSIONS' latest instalment to their *Battlefield* saga comes at a time where some exiting progressions can be established. First on their revamp list is graphical splendour. The PS3 opens a whole new world of capabilities and Swedish developer DICE is utilising it to develop the game from scratch, making for a richer, more impressive look to the models in the game. Soldiers will have varying facial expressions and more intrinsic detail for differing emotions and wounds; vehicles will have realistic textural finishes and dusty ground particles will kick up under the troop's feet and helicopter turbulence. However, the most impressive addition is a promise of a 90 per cent destructible environment, where destroying buildings and walls can be used to devastating measures against your enemies like tactically crushing the brickwork beneath their feet.

With a promise of a single-player mode equally as great as its online multiplayer and stealth environmental awareness coupling the trademark action of the series' past; the developers look to be aiming high. Add to that a dark, outcast storyline of vendetta and money rushes and the stale clichéd war game is evolving. With the arrival of the PS3 imminent, it's definitely encouraging to see some fresh aura circulating the series.

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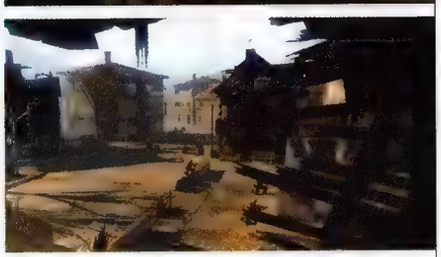
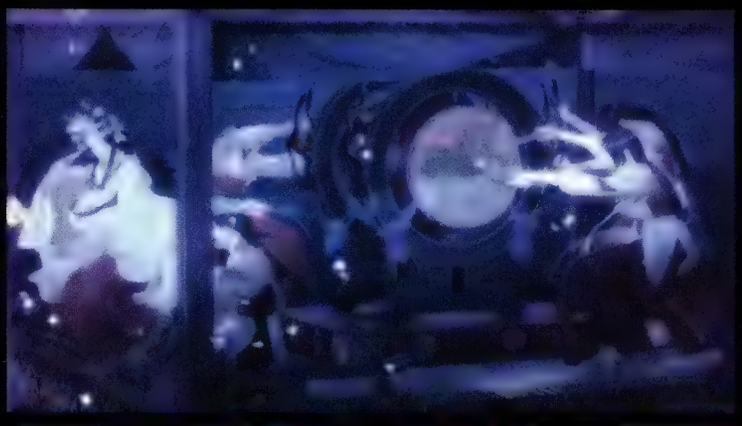


PS3 **Publisher**//EA **Developer**//DICE Sweden **Genre**//FPS **Players**//1/24 Online
Website//www.battlefield.ea.com **Release date**//TBA 2007



Ni-Oh

We really need more than a trailer

PS3 Publisher//KOEI Developer//TBA Genre//Action Players//1
Website// www.koei.com Release date//TBA 2007

SOME GAMES are deliberately shrouded in mystery, but none more so than *Ni-Oh*. Formerly known as *Oni*, the title was first announced way back in May 2005. Supported only by a teaser video, it gave little away and only hinted at a Japanese warrior called Ni-Oh who must fight in a civil war to carve his own destiny. The trailer itself showed two armies (both of which had literally hundreds of members) collide in battle and it took mere moments for the swords, bodies and blood to fill up the screen.

Fast-forward to the TGS 2006 and another trailer, and we still don't really know what *Ni-Oh* is about. Again, two armies fight it out, but there's a greater emphasis on a single character who kills dozens of guards in seconds. We guess this is *Ni-Oh* and as the trailer begins, a line of text reads, "Driven by destiny, he travelled to the end of the earth," and finishes with "In 2007, be Ni-Oh" – it seems like a fair guess. KOEI appears pretty defiant to stop any further info leaking out, but if the game is as fast-paced as the CG trailer, then it may have potential.

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Golden Axe

Classic game, new adventure

PS3 Publisher//Sega Developer//Secret Level Genre//RPG Players//1
Website//www.sega.com Release date//2007

WHEN SEGA announced *Golden Axe* was coming to the Playstation3 it divided fans of the series. As with all remakes, you had those who were excited about the return of the side-scrolling action game, but, there were also a plethora of people worried Sega was on the brink of destroying a classic. Either way, it was an exciting time to see which path the next-gen *Golden Axe* would take. Unfortunately, as we near the end of year, we still know very little. A trailer accompanied the announcement, but all it managed to do was raise more questions. Showing a scantily clad female riding into battle meant it wasn't all bad, but some concrete facts would've been appreciated. From what we do know, it certainly seems as if *Golden Axe* will be staying close to its roots, as the story revolves around a small band of Riders embarking on an adventure where they'll have to recruit allies and battle on foot or on the back of monstrous beasts. As expected, the game will be enhanced graphically, and if Sega manages to recreate the feel of the original, then we could be in for a treat. All we need now is some actual information.

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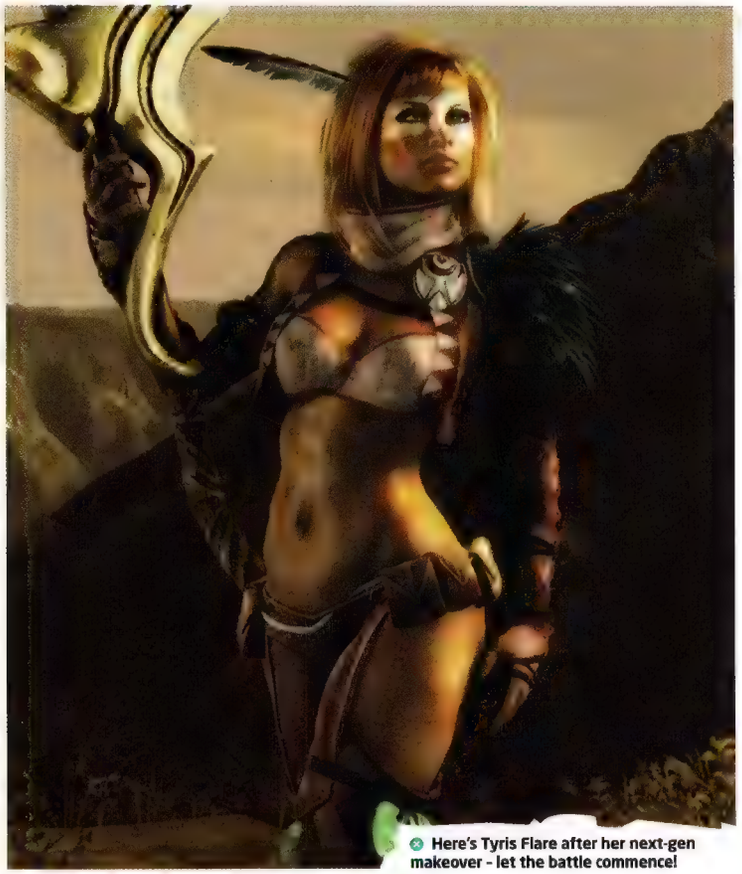

Here's Tyris Flare after her next-gen makeover - let the battle commence!

Gentlemen, start your machine guns

Full Auto 2: Battlelines

PS3 **Publisher**// Sega **Developer**// Pseudo Interactive **Genre**// Racing
Players// 1-8 **Website**//www.sega.com/fullauto2/ **Release date**// March 2007

WE'LL give it to you straight: if you like car chases, explosions and almost limitless gun violence you will love the *Bad Boys* movies. But more to the point you will probably get a kick out of *Full Auto 2* as well. After a quick perusal of these screenshots, no further explanation is needed as to what this game is all about – you get to race in fast cars, shooting opponents while trying very hard not to be on the receiving a wayward bazooka blast.

The two main single-player modes are fairly standard issue that involve you unlocking some new cars and various environments in the career mode and then competing in more traditional point-to-point racing in the arcade mode. With the team taking the 360 original as a base for the PS3 game, then adding in all-new cars and content to complement the console, improvements are immediately evident. The most effective additions surface in the online mode that now offers five different types of competition including Cat And Mouse and Base Assault modes. Although the races are straightforward, they do contain a pleasing amount of destruction and run very smoothly.

This summation can be applied to the entire game at this point – it's simple, yet enjoyable. It retains what worked in the original and plays to the Playstation 3's strengths, so you can expect to see some shiny graphics, an expansive city environment and frenetic online action, all in lovely 1080p.

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PS3 **Publisher**// EA **Developer**// In-house **Genre**// Racing **Players**// 1-8
Website// www.electronicarts.co.uk/needforspeed/ **Release date**// March 2007

You'll buy it whatever we say

Need For Speed Carbon

UNDERGROUND was good, *Most Wanted* was better and now we have a blend of the two – *Carbon*. Set up much like *Underground*, there's a huge city to explore where you can drive around choosing the races you want to compete in. With the open-world racer fundamentals in place, you're offered the usual selection of pink slip events, endless tuning options and licensed everything.

The new addition said to prevent this from being a 'carbon' copy of other *NFS* games is the crew-based racing mechanic. This involves recruiting other racers to act as blockers and scouts for you during a race. Blockers are like wingmen who will slam other racers off the track, clearing a path for you while scouts will race to the front of the pack and inform you of upcoming shortcuts. If the AI is up to scratch, this could well help the *Carbon* avoid the customary '7 out of 10' score.

Unlike *Most Wanted*, you aren't climbing your way up the Blacklist, but there are bosses to deal with. To get to these you have to race your way through a series of events similar to the previous *Need For Speed* games; including Spirit, Speed-trap and Drift. These are made all the more tasty by the fact you're now sliding on narrow mountain roads with a real chance of spinning off the edge. Touting a mixture of new and old features, *Carbon* is sure to have something for everyone while simultaneously exciting very few.

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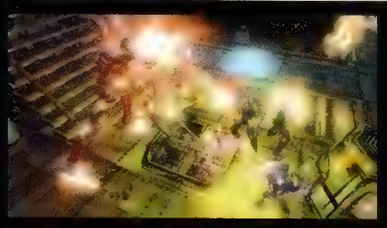

Bloomin' marvellous, another bloody superhero action/RPG

Marvel: Ultimate Alliance

PS3 **Publisher**// Activision **Developer**// Vicarious Visions **Genre**//Action/RPG **Players**//1-4 **Website**//www.marvelultimatealliance.com **Release date**//2007

YOU need to do more than just slap a load of marvel characters on a screen to make it appeal to the masses. Sure, you'll always have the hardcore contingent who are aching to see how each superhero's skills have been translated to the virtual world from the realm of the comic book, but to make a truly great game takes a little more thought than you might think, given the potential of the licence. Take EA's *Rise Of The Imperfects* as the perfect example. Pure, sweet, unadulterated cack from start to finish, and sadly for us, we did actually get to see the finish and we're lesser versions of ourselves for it.

No, it seems tricky to create something playable with the likes of *The X-men* and *The Avengers*, so when Activision come up with a formula that, admittedly, doesn't win, but similarly doesn't suck huge amounts of ass, who can blame them for sticking with it. We all know what *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* is, and there are undoubtedly a few out there who will, perhaps ashamedly, appreciate the inane button mashing joy it delivers. Be under no delusions; however, if you want a more accurate preview than these words can offer pop out and get yourself a copy of *X-men Legends*.

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Hellboy

Hellboy, hellgirl, superstar DJ... here we go

NONE of us are really that impressed by *Hellboy*. It's not that we dislike Mike Mignola's big red demon, as he's as charismatic a character as you're ever likely to see in comic books. No, the problem we have is... well, have a look for yourself. Check out the Spartan visuals. Fine, Hellboy himself sports some reasonable texturing, and his likeness and movement is similarly passable, but pretty much everything else in the game world leaves much to be desired.

Lazy-looking environments appear to be the worst culprit, and sure, we're expecting a good deal of polishing from Krome studios, but seriously, how much can one team do? Check out the enemy models. They all look a little similar, don't they? All sporting the same gormless videogame goon expression and moving in the same predictable pattern. It seems unlikely then, that anything truly inventive, innovative or particularly thrilling will ever come from *Hellboy*.

Of course, there will always be an appeal to the comic book fans out there and early indications are that it will feature an all-new storyline. Again, to us, this indicates a degree of laziness, or a distancing of the graphic novel from the game, which can never be a good thing. It's all pretty yawnsome if we're honest. The only thing were even vaguely eager to see is just how many items Hellboy can break. Let's hope this game isn't one of them.

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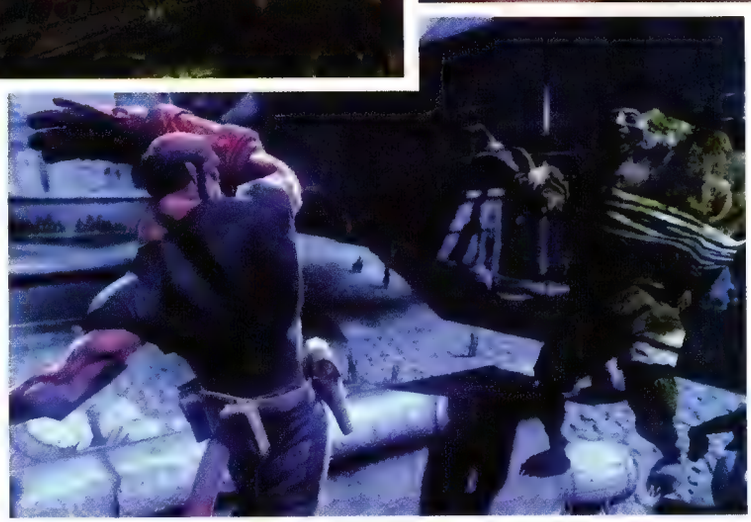

PS3 **Publisher**//Konami **Developer**//Krome Studios **Genre**//Action/Adventure **Players**//1 **Website**//www.konami.com **Release date**//2007

Like Chromehounds but with stuff happening

Armored Core 4

PS3 **Publisher**//Sega **Developer**//From Software **Genre**//Mech-based combat **Players**//1-2 **Website**//www.armoredcore.net/ac4/ **Release date**//TBA

AS every console manufacturer knows, if you want to wow the public with screenshots from a game running on a new console, your best bet is a mech game. Not because everyone likes mech games. They don't. Not outside of Japan anyway. But simply because it's easier to make mech-games look better than any other kind of game. There's seldom anything natural in them, save a few rocks and stuff, so you can show off just how shiny and detailed it is without making it look real.

Armored Core 4, like its predecessor *Armored Core 2* on PS2 and stable-mate *Chromehounds* on Xbox 360, makes the PS3 look fantastic. Of course, when it comes out pretty much everyone outside Japan will be disappointed at how clunky it is, and fail to see the appeal in endlessly customising and upgrading giant robot after giant robot. That said, there is a market for mechs in the west, albeit a small one, and *Armored Core* represents one of the strongest franchises in the genre. Anyone who can get past the awkward controls and appreciate that it's more about strategy than action should keep an eye out for this one soon after the PS3 launches.

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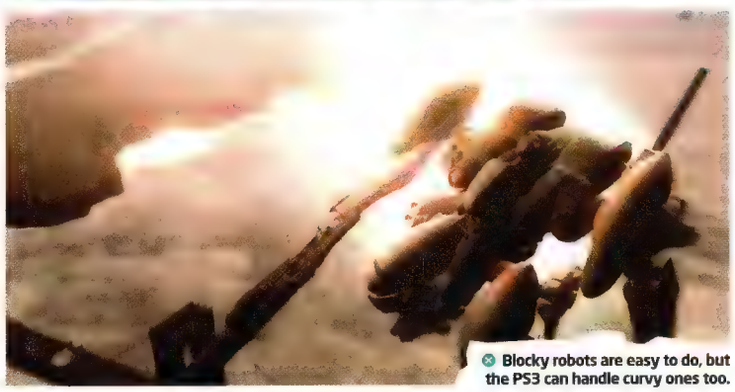
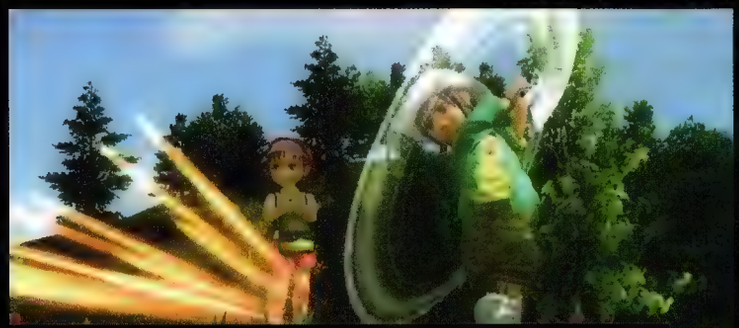


Blocky robots are easy to do, but the PS3 can handle curvy ones too.

Here's some zebra on a plain. Maybe there'll be a tiger in some woods.



Hot Shots Golf 5

Here's a little game for everybody out there

PS3 **Publisher**//Sony Computer Entertainment **Developer**//Clap Hanz **Genre**//Sports **Players**//1-4 **Website**//www.claphanz.co.jp **Release date**//TBA

HOT *Shots Golf* is the American name for *Everybody's Golf*, the cutesy Japanese golf game with a strong cult following all over the world. Which name it'll adopt when it finally lands on European fairways hasn't yet been confirmed. Just as long as you know they're the same game.

Number five in the series is looking much like the other four, with ridiculously cute visuals and simple yet addictive gameplay. The only noticeable difference from the rolling demo shown at TGS is the graphics, which basically look like the hi-res renders from the artwork of the previous titles running in an animated, playable form. We're assuming there will also be new courses, new characters and possibly some new features and game modes too, but details are sparse at the moment. Obviously, *Hot Shots Golf 5* isn't going to push the PS3's processing power to the max, and it won't come on a full-to-bursting Blu-ray disc, but the improved visuals ought to accentuate the charm of what's already a cracking game.

%complete

Blu movies

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Rating guide

ESSENTIAL	★★★★★
ROCKING	★★★★
GOOD	★★★
BARGAIN BIN	★★
BIN FODDER	★

SUPERMAN RETURNS

A story about a man who lifts progressively heavier things

ABOUT//

The failure for *Superman* to repeat the success of the Marvel heroes at the box office will come as thunderous blow to Warner Bros, who spent over a quarter of a billion on the project. Questions are no doubt still being asked as to how this happened and the easy answer is that Supes just isn't as hip as Spidey or Wolverine. True, but we'd argue that the quality of the film didn't really help matters either.

The main problem is Singer's near inexplicable reverence for the decades-old Richard Donner effort. Whole scenes and lines are freely ripped from the original, as are major plot strands, leaving *Superman Returns* dangerously close to re-make territory. This allegiance to Donner's version may have been more forgivable were the action sequences in anyway breathtaking, but unfortunately they fall well short of the mark. The hyped air shuttle sequence is certainly the strongest, but even that has an air of predictability about it and the same can be said for the falling debris when Metropolis suffers an earthquake. Superman is too powerful for such unimaginative set-pieces to excite; his strength and speed are well documented and it was up to Singer to test these to their limits. His clear failure to do so leaves *Returns* feeling bland when it should be extraordinary. It's often hard to stay interested, and this is only hindered by the relationship between Superman and Lois, which has now been complicated by the addition of a sequel-unfriendly kid.

Despite its many flaws though, *Superman Returns* has just about enough going for it. Indeed, the effects are often tremendous and in Brandon Routh Singer has clearly found a worthy successor to Reeve. But ultimately, this falls well short of our expectations leaving little but the sour taste of a missed opportunity. ★★

PICTURE QUALITY

With such an embarrassingly large production budget behind it, *Superman Returns* was always going to be a home cinema favourite. This Blu-ray transfer will do little to ruin the party either, as the quality is pristine. This is absolutely gorgeous stuff, the golden sheen of the cinematography working wonders with the detail of high definition. Without question this is the most impressive Blu-ray movie we've seen in terms of picture quality and we can only hope that it's got more than a little bit to do with the fact that it had a 2006 theatrical release. Even Imax 3D would struggle to compete. ★★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

Metropolis gets hit by an earthquake and the audience goes "Wow - looks nice."

Director//Bryan Singer
Cast//Kevin Spacey, Gabriel Byrne, Benicio Del Toro **Price**//$27.99

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Does the end nullify the means?

ABOUT//

There is an argument that *The Usual Suspects* can only really be enjoyed properly the first time around, as so much of the drama and mystery rests on the concluding twist. Of course, there is an element of truth to this, but then to concede the point fully would be to opine that the crime thriller is hopelessly shallow, devoid of such pleasures as original characters, strong performances and strong set-pieces, and that's simply not the case.

Not since Scorsese's *Goodfellas* had there been a collection of criminals so memorable and expertly performed, and for that reason *Usual Suspects* is worth owning. McQuarrie's dialogue hasn't blunted over the years either, the accusations and retorts still as delightful to hear as they were a decade or so ago, while the film's refreshingly light look works as proficiently as ever.

Oddly, some critics still ponder the film's worth sans twist, but that is ultimately an irrelevant supposition. The twist is there and it's one of the bravest and most effective surprises in film history – why would anyone want it any other way? ★★★★★

PICTURE QUALITY

Singer's crisp, bright scenes work terrifically in high definition. However, we still feel as though a smoother and cleaner transfer probably could have been made, as we have seen and therefore we expect slightly better efforts. ★★★★

Director//John G Avildsen **Cast**//Sylvester Stallone, Carl Weathers, Burgess Meredith **Price**//$25.99

ROCKY

"I got heart but I ain't got no locker"

ABOUT//

Amidst the chaos of the ring and after the bout with Creed and the often-imitated yelling of Adrian's name, Balboa inquires as to whereabouts of his girlfriend's new hat. In this briefest of moments lies a charm that few films and indeed film heroes can attest to having. It's what elevates *Rocky* beyond the status of mere sports movie and, quite rightly, into that elite group of true classics.

Warm, engaging and blessed with some of the most wonderful dialogue ever to grace a film, *Rocky* is as delightful a film as you're ever likely to see. Performing a tremendous balancing act between the hard-edged tone of Seventies Hollywood and the Capraesque, it's cold, gritty look is matched pound-for-pound with big-hearted characters disenchanted with their lot, but never hopeless. It's not profound stuff, nor is it particularly clever, but then perfectly constructed fairytales needn't be. ★★★★★

PICTURE QUALITY

Considering the quality of film the original was shot on back in 1976, this is some achievement. The gritty quality of the photography is as prominent as ever and in places the detail is astounding. However, it's just too held back by the source celluloid to ever be brilliant. ★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The run through the city. Clean and crisp - lovely.

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ABOUT// Despite not being as awful as many would have expected, given the relatively low budget and no-name director, *Fantastic Four* marks a low point in the comic book movie era. To some this may seem like a strangely harsh criticism, especially for a comic book flick that's as faithful to its source material as any before it, but there is just no denying the formulaic construction of this mediocre action film. There is undeniable passion and adventure behind the likes of Raimi's *Spider-Man* and Lee's *Hulk*, but this is as cold-hearted a studio film as we've seen in years. It's safe, plodding and blatantly aware of its role as the first in the series.

That said, there is still enough charm in Stan Lee's story of the scientists who turn to heroism after an incident with a cloud of cosmic rays to please most. The script is enriched with the odd decent one-liner, most of which are saved for the lips of Chris Evans' Human Torch, by far and away the standout performance of the film. However, those of you who want more than just a run-of-the-mill superhero film (how strange that one of those should exist), would be much better served opting for either of the *Spider-Mans*, any of the *X-Men*, *Hulk* or even... no wait, this is better than *DareDevil* – but we had to think about it. ★★

Director Tim Story **Cast**// Ioan Gruffudd, Jessica Alba, Michael Chiklis, **Price**// $25.99

FANTASTIC FOUR

More like the Quite Good Quartet

Fantastic Four has a visual panache that works well in the high-definition format. The bright, friendly colours of the film don't do much harm either and if the bigger set-pieces were up to scratch in terms of aesthetic impact, this would be one of the better transfers we've seen. ★★★★

PICTURE QUALITY

Even though a fair chunk of the effects leave a lot to be desired,

BEST BD SCENE

The bridge-based heroics that announce the super-team's arrival.

Director//Chris Nahon **Cast**//Jet Li, Bridget Fonda, Tcheky Karyo **Price**//$29.99

KISS OF THE DRAGON

Kung fu travels to Europe

ABOUT// It's always rather reassuring when a film that you secretly enjoyed when it was first released slowly builds a following. *Kiss Of The Dragon*, a Jet Li vehicle with a typical agent-turned-fugitive plot, is one such film, its reputation growing as every year passes. It's really not hard to see why either.

with some imaginative kung fu frequently on display and the main distributor of which is a cool as ice Li. Producer Luc Besson has clearly influenced the sleek look of the film as well, the European setting is as easy on the eye as the film is on the brain. ★★★

PICTURE QUALITY

The cool greys and slick blacks work well with the format, although the lack of real visual pizzazz prevents this from being a truly great transfer. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The scuffle in the old man's store.

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BECAUSE **WE CARE** ABOUT THE LITTLE FORMAT TOO

DVD round-up

Rating guide

ESSENTIAL ★★★★★
ROCKING ★★★★
GOOD ★★★
BARGAIN BIN ★★
BIN FODDER ★

Director//David R. Ellis **Cast**//Samuel L. Jackson, Nathan Phillips **Price**//£19.99 **Out**//26 December 2006

SNAKES ON A PLANE

We haven't had it with these motherf***ing snakes

ABOUT// *Snakes On A Plane* could well change the film industry. Seriously. New Line, the film's production company and distributor, kept a watchful eye on the internet – gauging the buzz and going so far as to re-shoot and add scenes based entirely on prospective fan feedback. Which is also the reason we have that immortal double F-bomb from Mr. Jackson.

It's a film that has been derided as much as it has celebrated, unsurprisingly by most of the people involved in the film's production – including its director and star. That tells you something about *Snakes On A Plane*. There is no crap – it knows it's a bad film and never alludes to being anything but.

The story is nonsensical, the CG effects are second-rate and it's full to the brim with inconsistencies. The whole thing feels like a made-for-TV horror film – albeit a bloody enjoyable one with great gore and a wicked sense of humour. By virtue of knowing how silly it is, the film rolls with the punches and focuses on entertaining its audience. Intentionally formulaic and unashamedly absurd, *Snakes On A Plane* is liberating stuff. ★★★

EXTRAS

Commentary from star, Samuel L. Jackson and director David R. Ellis, deleted scenes with optional commentary, *Snakes On A Plane* music video, blooper reel, features looking at the film's internet buzz, the snakes themselves and more. ★★★★

COMPETITION

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In the world of Renaissance not everything is black and white, well it is, but we mean that not everything is straightforward unlike this competition. Pathé Distribution is offering you the chance to win a fancy new Video iPod or one of ten *Renaissance* DVDs and all you have to do is answer this question correctly:

Daniel Craig provides the voice for *Renaissance*'s leading man, Barthélémy Karas, but which famous secret agent is he currently associated with?

A//Xander Cage
B//Cody Banks
C//James Bond

Renaissance is released to buy and rent on DVD on 27 November 2007. Winners will be notified after the 4 December 2007.

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Price//£19.99 **Out**//Now

NACHO LIBRE

Nacho's dynamite

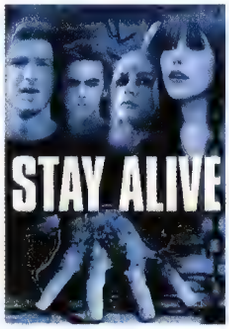
ABOUT// If you can stand Jack Black's constantly fluctuating accent you will find both him and *Nacho Libre*, Jared Hess' follow up to his wonderful indie debut *Napoleon Dynamite*, an absolute charm. Black is on fine form but it's his lithe, skeletal wrestling partner who steals the show. Essentially the *Rocky* story with a Strong Bad twist, it's got a lot of heart and a hell of a lot of laughs to boot. ★★★★

EXTRAS
★★★★

Price//£15.99 **Out**//Now

STAY ALIVE

Stay Away



ABOUT// When a character reveals they've spent a month putting a hundred hours into *Silent Hill 4* – one of the most linear and ephemeral "horror survival" games – and that to kill the female final boss you must use the Hyper Blaster, you know the film makers haven't got a clue. Despite some genuine scares and very pretty cinematography, this is formulaic, trashy and inconsistent nonsense. It's also offensive to even casual gamers. ★★

EXTRAS
★★

Price//£17.99 **Out**//27 December 2006

RENAISSANCE

All style, but no fun

ABOUT// Like most recent films of its ilk – including *Sky Captain And The World Of Tomorrow*, *Casshern*, and *Ultraviolet* – *Renaissance* is all style with very little substance. With a mix of black and white CG characters and sets, no grey values and some traditional hand-drawn animation, *Renaissance* is a visual feast. But its pacing is all over the place and it only picks itself up in the last twenty minutes. ★★

EXTRAS
★★★

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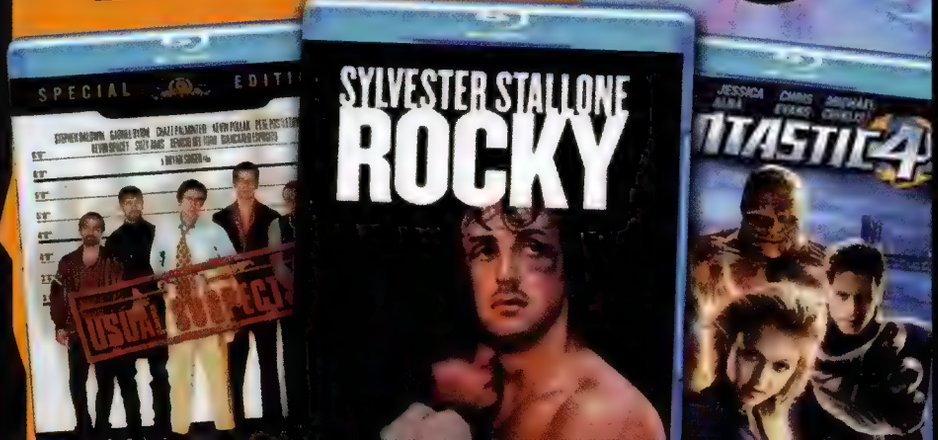

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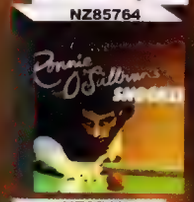

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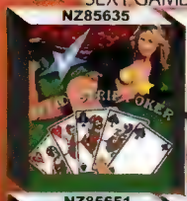

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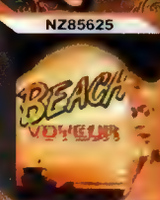

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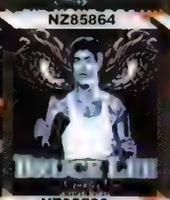

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Magic Moments
MEDAL OF HONOR
Remembering why PlayStation gaming is the best in the world

1 //The Beginning (Medal Of Honor) The moment you lifted the lid on your trusty grey PlayStation and slotted the disc in for the first time, you somehow knew something special was in store. From the first mission onwards, the original *Medal Of Honor* created a new benchmark for first-person shooters on the PlayStation.

2 //D-day (Medal Of Honor: Frontline) Undoubtedly inspired by the classic opening segment of *Saving Private Ryan*, *Frontline*'s first mission brought the *Medal Of Honor* franchise into the then next generation with a bang. It still stands up today as an incredibly well-designed and intense piece of gameplay.

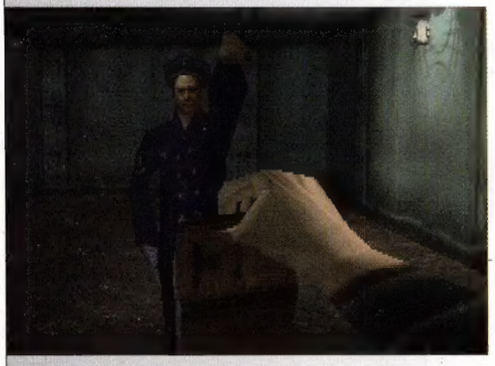
3 //Underwater love (Medal Of Honor) Only three missions in and already *Medal Of Honor* was throwing more and more varied situations at you. This assignment was a highlight of the game and had you scuttling a German U-boat. Pissed-off sailors and claustrophobic corridors make it one of the most memorable missions of the entire series.

4 //Snap happy (Medal Of Honor: Underground) Something that fell by the wayside in later entries of the series was the ability to photograph certain pieces of intel with a camera. Put to heavy use in *Underground*, the camera was also handy for catching slow-witted enemies off guard.

5 //Pearl Harbor (Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun) The movie may have sucked, but that didn't stop EA from borrowing yet another opening mission from a film. It may have been on-rails, but at the time of release it was one of the most action-packed sequences found in the WWII genre yet.

6 //The end is nigh (Medal Of Honor: European Assault) *European Assault* may have been a letdown overall, what with new kids *Call Of Duty* and *Brothers In Arms* getting all the attention, but it still managed to impress. The final mission in particular really felt like you were taking part in something big, with a large open battlefield that was littered with enemy trenches.

7 //Palm-sized war (Medal Of Honor: Heroes) Glitchy and over too quickly are two criticisms of *Medal Of Honor*'s first foray onto the PSP, but there's no denying it still looks great and plays pretty well too. Forget trying to get your PS2 online, this is the place to be for proper multiplayer *Medal Of Honor*.



8 //Papers, please (Medal Of Honor: Underground) It's that classic line you remember from countless war movies and, of course, *Indiana Jones*. The ability to flash your forged or stolen credentials at Nazi guards was another element that was lost in the transition to PS2, which is a shame as it made a change from blasting everything in sight.

9 //Elephant rider (Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun) There was plenty of new stuff to see in *Rising Sun*, as it offered up a range of locations from the Asian theatre of war, not to mention aggressive new enemies. However, the fact that you could hop on the back of an elephant and gun down enemies as it forged a path through the jungle is still the part that stands out the most.

10 //Panzerknacker (Medal Of Honor: Underground) We're still not sure exactly what the hell this was, but if you finished *Underground* then a new series of three missions was unlocked. They basically saw you fighting through more Germans to find pieces of the Panzerknacker, who, once assembled, was a strange tin man ready to fight by your side. Right...

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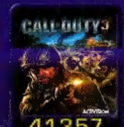

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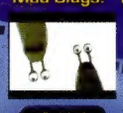
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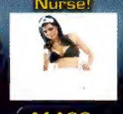
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